

A GIRL OF THE PERIOD

HER FORTUNES AND MISFORTUNES



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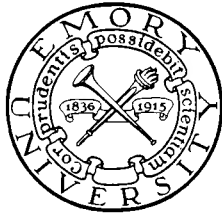


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A

GIRL OF THE PERIOD

HER FORTUNES AND MISFORTUNES

BY

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AUTHOR OF

"ETON SCHOOL DAYS," ETC., ETC., ETC.

LONDON

HENRY LEA, 13, PATERNOSTER ROW.

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A GIRL OF THE PERIOD:

HER FORTUNES AND MISFORTUNES.

CHAPTER I.

‘ AT HOME.’

THERE is nothing more striking about Lowersham than there is in a thousand other parishes of the same size and kind in England. It had its parson, its doctor, its lawyer, and its school. In addition to the latter, it had a military college, where young men, prematurely snatched from Eton, Harrow, and other places, had their ideas taught, if not to shoot, how to handle an army in the field, and other vanities connected with the art of war.

Philip Mapleson, M.D. and M.R.C.S., had married young ; his wife was possessed of a little money, and with this he had bought a practice at Lowersham.

They made him the parish doctor, which augmented his income but at the same time increased his work. They were very tiresome at Lowersham. The poor people were always getting ill, wounding themselves in the most suicidal manner with axes, bill-hooks, and knives, or having children. The old women encouraged typhus and were strongly attached to cholera ; if it was anywhere in the neighbourhood you might lay a hundred to one they would have it at Lowersham. As for the children they were the most troublesome, quarrelsome, dirty, grimy, ailing, failing set of juveniles under the sun, consequently it may be imagined that Doctor Mapleson did not have much spare time on his hands ; but he was always

cheerful, there was ever a smile on his lips and a welcome in his voice. It was as good as a dose of medicine to see him come into the house, and by his genial manner and incessant care he had often called back a poor mortal who, with one foot in the grave, had bespoken Charon with his ferry-boat.

The doctor had two children, both girls, Ada and Edith. They were both pretty, but while Edith, the younger, was small, delicate, dark, and Grecian, severe in her manner, fond of going to church, and very much given to saying prayers in private and singing hymns in public, reading books with a moral, and giving away tracts at a shilling a dozen, her sister was rather above the middle height, well-built, plump, fair, vivacious, of anything but a religious turn of mind, inclined to be irreverent in the presence of the clergy, had been known to laugh at church, could play, sing, and dearly loved a dance. Their mother had set her face against chignons, and they were compelled to abandon such vain things as frizzes, and make their hair into a neat coil at the back of their heads, which, when the prevailing fashion is taken into consideration, looked a little dowdy. They were circumscribed in the matter of trimming for their dresses, and usually wore them plain, for Mrs. Mapleson called all superfluous finery meretricious, and had once been heard to call a broad substance, known as military braid, the trappings of the devil.

Ada was a year older than Edith, and on leaving school, which they both did at seventeen, they found they were expected to settle down into a quiet humdrum existence at home, help their mother in the affairs of the house, take long walks to visit poor people at a distance, and become in fact the personification of goody-goody parish hacks, knowing nothing of the outside world, living in a narrow vicious circle, full of petty jealousies, bitter heartburnings, and deadly enmities—such as always sway small communities when the parson sits on the safety valve, forbidding freedom of speech, liberty of conscience, and setting his face against harmless recreation and innocent amusement.

The Rev. Mr. Lacy was a ritualist. He had laid out a considerable sum of money in beautifying the church, putting an æsthetic weathercock on the spire, organising a choir which never would sing in tune, buying gorgeous dresses and big candles, together with a censer, and a lot of frankincense from London, which smelt very much like burnt sandal-wood.

Some of the parishioners called him a mountebank, and joined the dissenters, some stopped away from church altogether, a few fought him tooth and nail in the vestry, and the rest went to church as usual and said it was all very pretty.

The parson had a son named Ernest, who leaving school at sixteen had come to read with his father, an old university man himself, before going up to matriculate at Oxford, it being his intention to take orders when old enough.

Ernest Lacy had done Ada Mapleson the honour to fall in love with her, and she more for the sake of something to do than anything else, had persuaded herself that she returned his passion. They had met at unseemly hours at romantic trysting places, and there taken vows that would make one shudder to listen to, swearing to always be true to one another come what might, hoping that cruel fate would persecute them to try their love and prove its purity, and I don't know what more romance of a similar kind. This sort of thing is very much in vogue with young people of a sentimental turn of mind, and even strong-minded women have been known in their youth to write verses, and declare in the twilight, when nobody was looking, that love was all in all to them—come weal, come woe, they were his eternally, and suffer themselves to be kissed by a thing without a beard.

The parents rather encouraged their loving intercourse. Mr. Mapleson and Mr. Lacy had congratulated themselves on the growing intimacy and hoped the youngsters would make a match of it. Thus stimulated to yet a higher pitch of folly, they engaged themselves and for a few days the talk of the village was the engagement of Miss Ada Mapleson to Ernest Lacy. People rather wondered why he had not chosen the younger sister, because he was himself of a devotional turn of mind; he read serious books and thought Jeremy Taylor or Tillotson very good company on a wet day; whilst Ada greedily devoured a novel in three volumes whenever she could get the chance, which was not often, and by this means got a glimpse of the great world; and to the credit of our novelists be it said, she was impressed with the idea that in the world of fashion everybody was a bigamist, and that it was quite proper to become discontented with the legitimate joys of wedlock and slide imperceptibly into the sin of adultery if you were at all unhappy with your husband. Forgery and poisoning she looked upon as genteel accomplishments, and gave an

occasional shiver as she thought of London and the Court of St. James's, the dens of infamy of May Fair, and that sink of iniquity Belgravia ; but she had to gain more reliable information than her books gave her, and the time was to come when she said that she had only beheld these things through a glass darkly.

It was said by ill-natured people that the reason Ada had received Ernest Lacy's addresses was, that he had made up to the lawyer's daughter, and she was glad of the chance of cutting her out. However this may be, Miss Peters, the young lady in question, did not hold up her head as proudly as formerly for some months ; she walked about with a dejected air, wore her shawl awry and let her hair blow about her face.

Lowershaw is in Derbyshire ; the villagers read the *Derby Chronicle*. In this priceless sheet appeared poetical lucubrations from time to time, signed Annie P., which everybody asserted was Annie Peters. These effusions spoke of broken hearts and a lying love.

One set of verses we subjoin. It was the wildest and most despairing. Ada Mapleson read it to Ernest Lacy and he sighed deeply ; his conscience smote him heavily, and at the early age of seventeen he began to think himself a Don Juan. So young, and so depraved ! and yet there was a sweet sense of consciousness that he had acted like a man of the world. He rather flattered himself that people talked about him, and that he attracted more attention than usual in walking up and down the village ; the girls looked slyly at him, and the old men shook their heads as who should say, " Ah, you sly dog ! "

Annie P. always gave her pieces of poetry a French heading. It showed first of all that her father could afford to pay for her to learn French at school, and it made her a superior being amongst those to whom the language of Molière and Racine was a dead letter ; then, again, it was the language of sentiment, and made the verses look interesting. It supposed that the writer had an elegant and refined mind.

TOUJOURS A VOUS.

" Ever thine ! " Those were the words
He spoke in loving tone
But two short years ago,
And now I am alone.

He is not dead. Shall I wish him
With my buried hopes?
No. Though with sand he taught me
To twist such fragile ropes.

Ropes by which I thought him bound
For ever, as he swore.
Yet scarce two years gone round,
And he is mine no more!

Ah, me! what to say—what do?
The present is very sad;
The past had charms. In the past
I felt my heart grow glad.

Is it well to love and chance
What after may betide?
Mayhap all men are not false
Though one has crushed my pride.

Ernest Lacy felt very like a villain when he read this outpouring of a bruised spirit—a spirit which his heartless conduct had bruised in the most unfeeling manner; but he found Ada's eyes fixed upon him, and with an heroic resolve he buried the past, smiled upon his present divinity, and went for a five-mile walk, carrying a heavily-laden basket, a pair of blankets, two German dolls, some sausage meat in a paper, a black bottle full of physic, and a bundle of worsted to darn stockings, for they were going to visit the poor in their homes.

We have mentioned a military college which was kept by Mr. Underwood, who had himself been in the army and made a very good coach. He had a nice gentlemanly set of fellows who read with him, and a few of them, who cared about it, varied the monotony of their daily existence by knocking up an acquaintance with the Rev. Mr. Lacy and Dr. Mapleson.

They were asked up to supper, and to have what the doctor called a hand at cards, but they preferred Ada Mapleson's society. They found her clever, spirited, always in a good temper, and unfeignedly glad to see them. She hated the society of her own sex, but she adored that of the lords of the creation, and was never so happy as when she was the centre of an admiring crowd of men. Even in her chrysalis state at Lowersham she succeeded in controlling the homage of all the men. Other girls were neglected and might ornament the walls; Ada, either standing near the fire-place, at the piano,

the card-table, which she detested, wherever she might be, had a bevy round her, and could talk to half-a-dozen at once.

Her principal admirers from the college were the Hon. Arthur Monteagle, eldest son of Lord Chippendale, Reginald Hall, and Percy Kendal. We mention these gentlemen by name because Ada Mapleson was destined to meet them again in London, when she was emancipated from home restraint

To her shame be it said, she flirted awfully with these three fellows, not giving the preference to either one of them, but contriving to make Ernest Lacy so madly jealous that he would go home and load his volunteer Enfield, as if he meant to shoot somebody ; but he always thought better of it, put the rifle away again, after he had pointed it at an imaginary cadet, and coquetted with the trigger.

Nothing was so thoroughly enjoyable to Ada as to see Ernest jealous. He did not dare to remonstrate with her, because he had once done so, and she read him a lecture about Miss Peters, which tingled in his ears for a long time, and completely turned the tables. So Ernest contented himself with saying on all occasions that he had the greatest possible aversion to incipient army men. They were always cads and gave themselves airs which neither their education, appearance, or position could justify, and as for a livery, why his father's servants could wear that with just as much martial bearing.

That about the livery was an allusion to a uniform Underwood's pupils wore, and on being repeated at the college, or Whitehall, as it was called, because a man of the name of White had once lived there, it gave great offence, so much so that one day Ernest Lacy was intercepted in a lonely lane by Arthur Monteagle, Reginald Hall, and Percy Kendal.

Arthur Monteagle stood before him and exclaimed—

‘I hear you have been slanging us, calling us cads, and saying we wear a livery ! What do you mean, sir ? I demand a written apology, and if I don't get it I shall take the law into my own hands and horsewhip you !’

Ernest Lacy refused to make any apology. He said he had a right to make what remarks he chose, he was not a fighting man, the profession he was about to adopt prevented him from being so. If he were assaulted he should summon all three

of them before the magistrate, and they would attack him at their peril.

The result was that he got very much mauled about, and went home with a black eye, sundry contusions about the face, and feeling very sore about the ribs. The cadets boasted that they had given him a decent hiding, and when Ernest went to Ada for sympathy she only laughed at him, and told him to go and get well before he again ventured to present himself before her.

The affair got wind, and as he had only been attacked by Monteagle, the others seeing fair play, it was settled that it served him right, and his friends dissuaded him from making the matter more public than it was already. But he had been made to look ridiculous, he had not come well out of the affair, and it was a death blow to Ada's regard for him.

When Arthur Monteagle next came to the doctor's house he went very penitently up to Ada, and said—

'I am afraid, Miss Mapleson, that you will not speak to me.'

'Why not?' she inquired elevating her eyebrows.

'I had the misfortune to lose my temper and thrash Mr. Lacy for something he said of us at Underwood's, and for the moment quite forgot that you took an interest in him; at least I have been told so.'

'Never mind what you have been told,' she answered, reddening a little. 'I have no sympathy for a man who cannot take his own part. None whatever. I think you acted perfectly right, and I am glad to see you came off so well—why, you have not got a scratch! I shall begin to magnify you into a hero soon.'

Arthur Monteagle was much gratified. During the remainder of the evening he sat by Ada's side, and went back to Underwood's saying that 'the eldest Mapleson girl was very nice, quite different to what one would expect in a place like this. By Jove! wouldn't have thought it! wouldn't have believed there was such a jolly girl if any one had told him before he came here.'

Percy Kendal, who was rather slangy and given to the stable, said, 'She was a clipper, and no mistake; an out-and-outer, and would make the running anywhere.'

As for Ada, she went to bed thinking how easy it was for a clever woman to twist men round her fingers. She was

beginning to taste the sweets of flirting. Her pride was gratified at making conquests. In a word, she was developing. The Dead Sea fruit was very alluring in the distance. She had yet, like thousands of other women, to discover that they were filled with dust and ashes.

CHAPTER II.

'THE LETTER.'

ONE morning at breakfast Mrs. Mapleson opened a letter addressed to her, and read and re-read it with such pertinacity that she aroused Ada's curiosity. The doctor was not at home, a patient had provokingly broken his leg, and as it was a very nice compound fracture, he gave his medical attendant as much trouble as he possibly could.

Edith was illuminating a pattern representing a guardian angel, one of the favourite high church prints. This was to help the fund which Mr. Lacy was raising for the internal decorations of the church, and Edith had done a number of illuminated texts and similar trifles, which were sold at Derby by the tractarian bookseller.

'May I ask, ma, dear, who your entertaining correspondent is?' inquired Ada.

'Certainly, my dear. It is a letter from my sister, Mrs. Joceline St. Pierre, of whom you have heard me speak; we were never very friendly when we were girls, her tastes were so different from mine, and as she has been so much abroad with her husband, who is a Frenchman as you know, we have not seen much of one another. Mrs. St. Pierre says that her only child, Eveline, wishes so much to come down to Lowersham and see her cousins, and if I will have her for a month, you or Edie can come up to town with Eveline at the beginning of the season.

It was then the middle of January.

'Oh, do have her, mamma!' cried Ada, in a transport of delight. 'I should so much like to see my Cousin Eveline. It will be quite an event for us, shut up as we are down here—and then to go to London in my turn—how delightful! Oh, do, mamma, do, do, do!'

'I am not sure whether Eveline is the sort of girl with whom you ought to associate,' answered Mrs. Mapleson, thoughtfully. 'If she is what her mother was at her age, I

feel positive she would only unsettle and do you harm. However, I will talk to your father about it.'

'Am I always to live here?' said Ada, with a discontented look, 'and never see anything of the world?'

'You will remain with me until you are married,' replied her mother; 'after that of course your husband will take you where he thinks fit. If you are to be a clergyman's wife, which at present seems to be arranged, the quieter you keep the better for you. If you once get gay it will be difficult to reconcile you to your parish duties, and you will always be longing for that which you cannot attain to—the result of which, I need not tell so sensible a girl as yourself, will be utter misery.'

'If being a parson's wife is to be like always being at church, I think I shall reconsider my determination,' said Ada, with a toss of the head.

'My child, my child,' cried Mrs. Mapleson, in a warning voice, 'you must check that impetuosity. It is a bad sign. No good can possibly come of such wild speeches. Take a lesson from your sister.'

'I'll give Edie the church if she will let me have the army,' said Ada.

This was in allusion to a remark made by the doctor a short time before. He had noticed that Percy Kendal paid Edith some attention, and had said that something might come of it. It was but a hint, nevertheless girls think a great deal of such observations, which sink deeply into their minds.

'And I,' exclaimed Edith, looking up from her work, 'very, very much prefer the church. It is so noble to practise self-abnegation and live for others.'

'Very well, that's a bargain, Edie. Give me your cadet, and you shall have my pet parson,' rejoined Ada.

'Ada,' cried her mother, in a tone of alarm and remonstrance, 'what is the meaning of this levity? I never heard such a thing. You are quite changed lately.'

'Do have Eveline St. Pierre—what a pretty name! I do wish it was mine—down here, ma dear, and I will promise to be so good. I will be the best girl in the village, and that is saying a great deal in very proper, pious Lowersham.'

Mrs. Mapleson smiled and repeated that she would consult her husband. She could not say anything definite at present.

It was a matter for consideration. All that day Ada could think of nothing but her fashionable cousin. She had often heard of her, and once her name had got into the paper when she was bridesmaid to Lady Caroline Evizard, who married Captain Chalmers, all for love, she having fifteen thousand a-year and the captain nothing but his pay, his agreeable manner and his good looks. She pictured Eveline St. Pierre to herself as a tall, handsome, dashing girl, who had only to appear to conquer. And her dress! Ada feared that her scanty and anything but expensive wardrobe would be entirely thrown into the shade by her cousin. In this belief she was very right. In her simplicity and innocence she thought she dressed pretty well, while in fact she did not know what dressing was, as the art was understood by such girls as Eveline, Lady Caroline, and their set.

‘Edie,’ said Ada after breakfast, ‘would not you like to have Eveline St. Pierre down here? It would be a delightful change. I will give papa no peace till he consents. Do join me, together we shall be irresistible. Papa believes in your judgment, you are such a steady-going old party, as Arthur Monteagle said of somebody the other day.’

‘I don’t know whether I ought to join you in such a request, dear,’ replied Edith quietly.

‘Why not, where’s the harm?’

‘Perhaps there is no harm. I don’t say there is, but if she is a fast, rackety girl I am sure we shall be infinitely better without her. The St. Pierres are rich and we should never be able to keep pace with Eveline. You seem to forget that we are the daughters of a country doctor.’

‘I don’t forget it. I wish I could,’ replied Ada, almost inclined to cry. ‘You are all against me, all of you. I wish I were a lady with lots of money, an heiress, I mean. Wouldn’t I make the men civil to me! they should go on their knees by dozens and then I would laugh at them.’

‘Oh! Ada, how can you?’ cried Edith, laying down her brush; ‘you would make any one who didn’t know you think you were a heartless coquette. Believe me, dear, there is nothing so conducive to happiness as being good and simple.’

‘If you are going to preach and croak I shall go out,’ interrupted Ada. ‘I hate being preached at; goodness knows we have enough of that on Sunday, church twice a-day and two sermons! If it was not for seeing Underwood’s fellows

there I wouldn't go, I declare I wouldn't. People like you would turn every place into a nunnery. I believe if we were Spanish girls you would all conspire against me and shut me up in a convent for six months.'

'If you really mean what you say, which I sincerely hope and trust you do not, the discipline would not do you any harm,' answered Edith.

'You little man-hater !' exclaimed Ada, tapping her playfully on the knuckles.

'Don't do that, dear, you have made me run one colour into another,' remonstrated Edith. 'I am not averse to men's society. It would be unnatural in any girl to be so. But I do not think it ought to be made the sole end and aim of a woman's existence.'

'I do,' rejoined Ada. 'I hate and distrust women, they are always abusing one another. Even you, my sister, who ought to love me, have been reckoning me up, and you have written the 'Mene, mene,' on the wall as plainly as if Daniel was coming to read it. All women are cats. 'I like men, and I shall go and walk towards Whitehall; perhaps I shall see Arthur Monteagle or some one. He says he hates boys' games, and never plays at anything. So when he has any time to spare—and it's a shame that such a nice agreeable fellow should ever have to work out sums and Latin and things—he takes a walk, or goes somewhere and smokes. I wish I could smoke.'

'Smoke !' repeated Edith, laying down her brush again, this time in utter horror. 'Are you mad, Ada? any one would think you had taken leave of your senses. What next?'

'Well, I don't know ; lots of things, I'll bet you, if Eveline St. Pierre comes down. I'll write to her myself, if papa objects, and get her a room in the village.'

'It's my firm opinion, Addie,' said Edith, very seriously, 'that——'

'I'm going to the bad,' put in Ada, laughingly.

'Yes, indeed ; I regret we ever encouraged Mr. Underwood's boys, they have only done you harm ; you have caught their manners and their fast expressions. They have completely changed you. Poor Ernest, I am sorry for him.'

'Never mind, Edie, dear, he has got you to fall back upon, and you like the church, you know, that's one comfort for him,

isn't it? You won't object to him because he is second-hand, will you?'

'You may ridicule the matter as much as you like,' answered Edith, whose manner showed that she was pained—deeply pained—at her sister's light and airy way of treating the subject. 'I repeat I pity Ernest Lacy, who really and truly loves you with all the fond affection of a true heart.'

'Anybody would suppose you had been reading "Pamela," only Richardson's so dreadfully out of date,' said Ada. 'If you can go into such heroics about the man I shall think you really care for him; upon my word I don't believe I do.'

'For shame, Ada. Do you not remember you are engaged to him? God will punish such wickedness.'

'Don't talk like that,' exclaimed Ada becoming more serious; 'I am very foolish perhaps, my giddy head will run away with me sometimes. Kiss me, dear, and forgive me; I don't mean anything, I won't chaff any more.'

'You don't know how pleased you have made me by these few words, dear, dear Addie,' said Edith, her eyes brightening as she rose and threw her arms round her sister's neck, and kissed her tenderly. 'I don't believe for an instant that you have a bad heart, it is only thoughtlessness—that is your besetting sin. To-night, dear, we will kneel down together and pray for strength for you to resist it.'

Ada made a slight grimace, which passed unnoticed by her sister, and said she should go out for a walk; her head ached a little, and she thought a blow in the fields would do her good. Edith regretted that she was so busy that she could not accompany her, and Ada putting on her clothes went by herself.

Although Edith Mapleson was by her own showing of such a sedate and serious turn of mind, she had, nevertheless, a temper of her own, which at times broke through all the restraints she placed upon it.

This was evidenced, in a marked manner, when Eveline St. Pierre became temporarily an inmate of the doctor's household.

On one occasion, on the famous 14th of February, when she had expected a valentine of a gratifying nature, and received one of a direct contrary kind, her cousin Eveline, being the happy recipient of one that was all that was agreeable and nice, she gave way to a burst of passion, which placed her character in a new light, and showed that fierce fires may burn beneath stolid exteriors.

Crushing her distasteful valentine in her hand, she glared at Eveline with the rage of a tigress, and was still more incensed by the calm manner and irritating smile of her contented and accomplished cousin, who, it must be confessed, aggravated her distress by her utter want of sympathy with her disappointment.

As Ada passed the vicarage she saw Ernest standing in the doorway, and was constrained to speak to him. Just as she had said, 'How do you do?' although she was far from being in the humour to be civil to him, and was in truth rather glad of the chance of some one to tyrannise over, the three cadets, who were inseparable, Monteagle, Hall, and Percy Kendal, came round a corner arm-in-arm. Of course since the affair in the lane there had been a deadly feud between the college boys, or men as they called themselves, and Ernest Lacy. They made a dead stop before Ada and removed their hats politely, and with a military precision, which made her smile. Ernest scowled at them and drew Ada's arm within his own.

'Don't, please,' she said. 'I cannot bear being buckled to any one.'

He released her arm, with a gesture of annoyance, and the cadets, more to worry him than anything else, began to speak to Ada.

'Good-morning, Miss Mapleson. It is an unexpected pleasure to meet you,' exclaimed Arthur Monteagle. 'We were taking a stroll, and scarcely ventured to hope we should meet with a vision of beauty.'

Good-morning, Mr. Monteagle,' answered Ada. 'I am afraid there is very little sincerity about you, you are so fond of paying me compliments. Have you been reading "A Dream of Fair Women" and got dazzled by the poet's rhapsodies?'

'There is no occasion to read anything of that sort when you are about, Miss Mapleson,' he answered, gallantly.

Ernest Lacy was boiling over with impatience and determined not to lose a chance of being rude, so he exclaimed—

'It's very odd that you fellows cannot see that Miss Mapleson does not want your society; you will please her a great deal more by continuing your walk than by staying here.'

'Perhaps you'll allow Miss Mapleson to speak for herself—as yet I have seen no indication of her wishing us gone,'

observed Percy Kendal, who was very fiery, and as he said, always ready for a row.

Every one looked at Ada, who, mischievously wishing to encourage the dispute, fanned the flame by remaining silent, knowing very well that none of them would venture to fight before her.

‘You see you are not wanted,’ continued Ernest Lacy ; ‘and I can tell you, and do tell you to your faces, that you are not gentlemen !’

‘Are you a gentleman ?’ asked Arthur Monteagle quietly.

‘Of course I am,’ was the reply.

‘In that case, I am sincerely rejoiced to think that we are not,’ rejoined Arthur Monteagle.

This answer was so apt, that even Ada could not restrain a smile, which roused Ernest’s ire terribly. With flashing eye and flushed cheeks he said, in a tremulous voice—‘Do you intend to make a fool of me, sir ?’

‘By no means,’ retorted Arthur Monteagle, who was decidedly in a witty vein that morning, ‘nature has saved me the trouble.’

Ernest Lacy became frantic, what to do he knew not ; he could not make a disturbance between his father’s house and the church which was exactly opposite. He was afraid if he said very much that there would be a repetition of the affair in the lane, and he was not on that occasion so enamoured of his personal appearance as to wish to have a second edition of it. Luckily for him his father, who had intended to go to Derby that day, and had set off for the station, appeared in sight. The presumption was that he had missed the train. When he approached the group, he shook hands with everybody, saying, ‘I am glad to see you, gentlemen. Ada, my dear, you are quite a stranger. Come inside, you must not stand out here. I daresay Mrs. Lacy can find a glass of wine and a biscuit. I wanted to go to Derby to-day, but I missed the train.’

‘Perhaps you did not run fast enough, sir ?’ remarked Reginald Hall.

‘Oh, yes, I did, I ran fast, but I did not start soon enough,’ answered the parson, with a laugh.

Turning to his father, Ernest said—

‘I think you will cancel your invitation when you hear that I have just been grossly insulted by these people.’

‘I am sorry to hear that, I am sure, my boy, but I cannot allow your private quarrels to stand between me and my hospitality.’

‘This is the second time.’

‘Well, what then? You fell out, had a fight, which was wrong, but which is natural. The flesh is weak at times, or there would be no need of either repentance or atonement. You have not met since. Here was an opportunity for reconciliation—you have neglected it. It seems to me, Ernest, that you are sadly forgetful of Christian charity.’

‘Would you have me hit on one cheek and turn the other to the smiter?’ asked Ernest.

This was said in such a comical tone, and the word ‘smiter,’ appeared so exquisitely funny to the cadets, that they burst out laughing.

The question was a difficult one for the parson to answer, and he contented himself with saying, ‘Forgive and forget,’ and added something about ‘having our trespasses forgiven as we forgive them that trespass against us.’

These platitudes offered Arthur Monteagle a chance of being magnanimous, and he exclaimed—

‘I shall have the greatest pleasure in shaking hands with Mr. Ernest Lacy. I have no wish whatever to prolong the dispute.’

‘That is right—that is manly. That is the sort of spirit I like to see displayed,’ cried the parson. ‘Come, Ernest, never bear malice, my boy. You are met half way, and unless you want to incur my serious displeasure you will accept the proposal now made to you.’

With an ill grace Ernest, who had been hanging back, now stepped forward and touched the tips of Arthur Monteagle’s fingers.

Mr. Lacy now led the way into the house, taking Ada with him, and asking kindly after her people; he was glad to hear they were all well. Mrs. Lacy was in the drawing-room, looking over some Sunday-school accounts which she had to prepare for an audit. She rose to receive her visitors, and rang for some wine and glasses.

Shortly afterwards, Mr. Peters, the solicitor, dropped in to speak about some legal matter relating to the glebe lands, and the conversation became general.

‘I think I told you, Lacy,’ he exclaimed, ‘that old Giles

had filed a petition for a divorce. Well, his wife has filed a cross petition, as we lawyers call it.'

'I am not a bit surprised at that,' replied the parson. A cross petition. It is just like her. She never did a good-tempered thing in her life.'

There was a laugh at this, and then the conversation turned upon the weather, which had begun to get very much colder. There were symptoms of ice, and great hopes of skating were awakened in every breast.

'Do you skate, Miss Mapleson?' asked Arthur Monteagle, who had contrived to get a seat near her.

'No, I do not, but I should so much like to learn,' she replied; adding, 'I daresay my cousin does, and if she comes down here I shall get her to teach me.'

'I wish I might have that delightful task,' he rejoined. 'Pray may I ask who your cousin is?'

'Miss St. Pierre—Eveline St. Pierre. She is not a bit like me, you know. They say she is awfully fast. Do you like fast girls, Mr. Monteagle?'

'Upon my word, I hardly know how to answer you. If you had not said you were not fast I should have replied in the affirmative.'

'Perhaps I have formed a wrong estimate of my own character.'

'I am afraid to say.'

'Afraid—why?' she queried.

'I might offend you,' he answered.

'Not the least bit in the world. I adore frank language in people. Nothing pleases me so much as for persons to speak their minds,' she exclaimed, with enthusiasm.

'Then I should say if you are fast, slowness is a mistake; if you are slow, it is bad to be fast.'

This delicately and carefully-turned compliment made Ada smile, and she replied—

'Oh, you are such a flatterer and quite a courtier! You ought to be a diplomatist. I am sure there would be no wars if you did not wish them. You would have everything your own way.'

'Not everything,' he answered, with a sigh which was meant to convey volumes, but which, as Ada was listening to a remark of Percy Kendal's, was not so expressive as a penny pamphlet.

'May I see you home?' he asked, as she rose to go.

Ada looked round for Ernest, who was gazing vacantly out of the window.

'I shall be very glad,' she replied.

Ernest only emerged from his reverie in time to see Ada going out with Arthur Monteagle; he contrived to come up to him and say in a low voice, which was not audible to Ada, 'I am destined for the church. It is lucky it is not a Church Militant for your sake.'

'Not at all. You can waive any protection the cloth you are going to put on will give you,' replied Monteagle.

'The time will come.'

'It's very odd, but the time generally does come if you wait long enough. Miss Mapleson, permit me to offer you my arm.'

And so they went off, leaving Ernest Lacy to gnash his teeth with a rage which he did not attempt to conceal.

'I am sorry to say that I shall not be here much longer,' said Monteagle. 'I am going up for my examination soon, and hope I shall pass. If I get ploughed, I don't think I shall come back here, but go and coach somewhere else.'

'Do you not like Lowersham?' asked Ada.

'Your kindness has made the place tolerable, but I must admit, as you like candour, that it is awfully dull. You have your reasons, of course, for hiding here, but I am surprised to see any birds about.'

'Birds!'

'Yes, you would think that anything having wings to fly away with would not stop.'

'Oh, you are such a quiz, Mr. Monteagle!' said Ada, with a light laugh.

'Do ladies like quizzes?'

'I—I think so.'

'Then I shall always be a quiz; I will cultivate the art. shall I?'

'How can I tell? You will please yourself. Oh, here we are at my house; I cannot ask you in this morning, as I know mamma is busy writing letters. Good-bye.'

As he walked away he said to himself—

'Having made use of me to pique that other fellow, she gets rid of me. She's as clever as she's pretty. If I don't go away soon, I shall fall head over heels in love, and I don't think Lowersham is worth a coronet.'

CHAPTER III.

'THE VISIT.'

ADA MAPLESON was not a bad girl ; she was weak, frivolous, and vain, but she had a good heart, and felt sorry for Ernest Lacy, whose misfortune it was to have been placed in comparison with such men as Arthur Monteagle, who was better bred, had more manners, was a public-school boy, and had mixed with gentlemen all his life, which was something, short though his life was, because it was at that early period that impressions for bad or good are taken.

Ernest Lacy could not help suffering by such a comparison. Ada, with a woman's quick perception, saw it, and was rather ashamed of having Ernest for a lover. She thought that if she retained him as an admirer she would like to break off the engagement that existed between them. This was not right, but it was the fault of her parents, who had allowed her to engage herself before she knew her own mind.

That she had seriously offended Ernest she did not doubt. Though she had said nothing that morning she had not taken his part, and had laughed when the laugh went against him. She expected some violent letter from him, or that he would call at her father's and make a scene. What he did do was to sit down and write some verses, which he thought very bitter and very clever. This was the result of Miss Annie Peters' example. When she was heart-broken, she wrote poetry for the *Derby Chronicle*.

'Ah !' he thought, 'it is coming home to me now, as Annie said it would. If I had not treated her badly this would not have happened. I am being punished for my behaviour to her.'

So he wrote the following lines, which he put into an envelope and sent to Ada Mapleson. He called the lines 'After the Shock,' which was a bad title because he was still suffering from it, but he wanted her to believe that he was more callous and indifferent than he really was. Writing these verses was a great relief to him. It was like letting the steam

off from an overcharged boiler. He thought himself a man of the world; heaps of other men have done the same thing. There is great virtue in scribbling in rhyme.

‘One word more before I go,
I promise it shall be the last;
You have brought me heavy woe,
But that is buried in the past.

‘We this day for ever part,
Your amusement now is over;
You have tried to break my heart,
But you have only lost your lover.

‘I am strong—much stronger than
You gave me credit for at first;
Boy in years—in mind a man,
I am but hardened at the worst.

‘Nature made you cruel and cold;
After all, why should I blame you?
If I talked till you grew o’d,
I am sure I should not shame you.

‘Good-bye, Ada—I am going,
Your eyes are moist—are you crying?
A weakness you are showing
I would stifle were I dying.’

This was very childish, no doubt, but he believed every word when he wrote it, and it did him good. Ada was quite affected at first when she read the lines, and actually did shed a few tears, but the taunt in the last stanza made her resolve to brave it, and as she sponged her face she said—

‘That’s what the Peters’ girl taught him. I hate poetry, except Moore and Byron.’

She said nothing to any one about Ernest Lacy’s effusion, but hiding it away in a corner of a drawer, determined to treat it with contempt, which she knew would annoy him more than anything else. Still it was a virtual breaking off of the engagement, and as such she received it gladly. Abrupt transitions, however, are always disagreeable, and she could not help wishing that the episode had not taken place.

Most families in Lowersham dined in the middle of the day. The Maplesons did so. The doctor had returned from setting the poor man’s leg, and had to run off directly to attend to a case of paralysis at Stantonwick three miles off. John the

stableman was putting the horse to the trap, and the doctor was hastily eating his dinner, when Ada came in.

'It's a pity you girls can't learn to be punctual,' exclaimed the doctor; 'here it is half-past one.'

'Mrs. Lacy kept me at the vicarage, papa,' said Ada. 'Has mamma told you about Aunt St. Pierre's letter, and Eveline's wish to come down here?'

'I heard something about it. Well, the girl can come if she likes, though St. Pierre has not been too civil to us. I mean he never put himself out of the way to send a basket of fish or a haunch to Lowersham, though he's got plenty of money. If we knock up an intimacy with them, it might be a good thing for you or Edie.'

'So I thought, papa, but mama seems to think otherwise,' replied Ada, with a look of triumph.

'I don't know why she should, but your mother generally has reasons, and good ones, for all she does.'

'I will talk to your father when he is more at leisure this evening,' said Mrs. Mapleson. 'He has not time to go into an argument now.'

'Quite so. That's very considerate. Has John brought the horse round?'

The noise of wheels grating on the gravel was a sufficient answer to this question, and the doctor was soon driving quickly off in the direction of Stantonwick.

'It was wrong of you to worry your father when he was in a hurry, Ada, my dear,' exclaimed Mrs. Mapleson, when they were alone. 'I am afraid you have very poor notions of what a wife's duties ought to be.'

'A wife ought to do what she likes and have her own way in everything. I mean to have mine when I marry,' answered Ada.

'That is very well in theory, but I am afraid you won't find it so easy in practice, and if you try to assert your supremacy by the aid of temper only, you will be set down as a termagant, a virago, a shrew.'

'Shall I tell you my idea of what a wife should do, ma, dear?' asked Edith.

'By all means, and I will undertake to say that your view of the case will be more sensible than your sister's.'

'I may be wrong, but I think a husband's happiness must of necessity be produced by his wife. She must be careful of

his prejudices and tender to his weaknesses, and above all she must try not to irritate him ; a man has not naturally so much patience as a woman, he grows obstinate if he is driven, and he has a hatred of scenes which a woman can always make by storming, crying, or fainting. A woman who answers her husband when he is angry increases his passion, and commits a fatal mistake ; she should wait till he cools and his reason returns—then is her opportunity. It is my opinion that quarrels, even though they are made up almost directly, weaken a woman's influence ; the wound has been inflicted and it rankles. Men forget what they say in the heat of their passion, but a woman's retorts always remain fixed in their minds, and annoy like the barbed darts which are thrown at a furious bull by matadors in the Spanish arenas.'

'Bravo !' said Ada, clapping her hands sarcastically, 'yours will be a model husband when you get one.'

'Edith is right though,' said her mother ; 'there is a great deal of sense in what she says, and you will act wisely in remembering it.'

'I wonder what cousin Eveline would say to such advice?'

'We will not condemn her until we see her.'

'I think that flight of eloquence of Edie's about the barbed darts and the furious bulls and the matadors in the Spanish arenas very fine. What books have you been reading, lately Edie ? Is that Paley or Richardson ?' said Ada, laughing.

Edith made no answer, and with a yawn Ada threw herself into a chair and looked into the fire.

'I wish I had something to do,' she remarked.

'The vineyard is large enough. It's the labourers who are idle. You are one of those who wait till the heat of the day is past. Take care the night does not overtake you unawares. The foolish virgins, you know——'

'Oh, mama, please don't,' said Ada, entreatingly. 'I cannot bear all that Exeter Hall ; parables are very well, but there is a time for all things. I shall have to go out as a governess or marry Ernest Lacy in self-defence, you and Edie give me no peace ; any one would think I was the naughtiest girl in Derbyshire.'

'You have your faults, but they are more those of omission than commission, and I won't go such a length as that. You might do worse than marry Ernest Lacy, and when you are

engaged to him I am surprised to hear you speak so lightly of him, and your solemn promise to be his wife.'

'Suppose he were to think better of it, or I were to?'

'It would be a great blow to us.'

'Not to me. I should think it a relief. My solicitor would not trouble him with an action for breach of promise; in my opinion the happiest life is a single one. "Love not" shall be my motto.'

Mrs. Mapleson took no further notice of her daughter. There are some people who like to make themselves out worse than they are. Ada was one of them. She was not so bad as she painted herself. There were times when she felt horribly bored, and then her discontent would manifest itself in silly speeches.

When the doctor came home he was tired. He had been up half the night, so he had a cup of tea and threw himself down on the sofa, to snatch a few hours' rest before supper. Every one was as quiet as a mouse; the girls worked, their mother read. The doctor woke up as fresh as a rose, and at once began to talk.

'Thank goodness,' he exclaimed, 'I think this will be a quiet night. I declare the villagers have been so troublesome lately that I began to imagine they had all the "ills that flesh is heir to." If it had gone on I should have had to engage an assistant.'

Mrs. Mapleson did not broach the question of Eveline St. Pierre's proposed visit until the girls had gone to bed, and they could converse undisturbed; then she said—

'If you are not too tired, dear, I should like to know what I am to do with regard to Eveline. I did not like to answer my sister's letter until I had consulted you.'

'What's the matter with the girl?—why should she not come?' asked the doctor.

'I fancy that she will not be a good companion for our girls,' answered Mrs. Mapleson, hesitatingly.

'There you are wrong; our girls are a little too countrified if anything. They want brushing up. It will be like sending them to a finishing school to let them have a month in their cousin's society. You need not be afraid of their learning habits of extravagance; they are far too sensible not to know that they must cut their garments according to their cloth.'

‘If you think she ought to come, and we shall not be doing wrong, I will write at once.’

‘Do so, my dear; the St. Pierres will of course ask one of the girls back again, and there is an introduction to the best London society at once, without a penny of expense on our part. I like the girls to look stylish.’

This conversation settled the matter; and Mrs. Mapleson wrote to her dear sister, telling her in conventional language how glad she would be to see Eveline, of whom she had often thought. She hoped she was as good as she had promised to be beautiful; and, with some items of family news, she concluded the letter, begging her to send Eveline whenever it would be most convenient to spare her.

A few days afterwards she received an intimation that Eveline would leave London on the day following by the eleven o’clock express, and requesting that some one might be sent to the station to meet her.

Ada was charmed, and became more delighted when a little three-cornered, pink, scented note, addressed to ‘My eldest cousin,’ fell out of the envelope, and was picked up and handed to her.

‘This is evidently intended for you, Ada,’ said Mrs. Mapleson.

Ada took the note and, unfolding it, read—

‘MY DEAR COUSIN,

‘Excuse me for not using your Christian name, as politeness suggests I ought to; but, the fact is, I am unacquainted with it, and mama’s memory is so very treacherous with regard to names that she can give me no information on the point. I tried her with everything from Selina down to Mary Anne and Susan, but she is sure it is not either of the latter.

‘I scribble this to say I hope we may be good friends, though I am afraid I have nothing but my high spirits to recommend me to your favourable notice. We have been dissipating awfully in Paris for the last two months, and at Vienna and Baden before that, so that I am knocked up, and should come to a dead lock if I did not have some sort of a change soon. One positively wants the constitution of a—I really can’t think of anything strong enough, please suggest some cast-iron preadamite creature—to stand Continental life.

‘I believe I am as hard as nails, as Algy Seaton says. You don’t know Algy Seaton, he is in the Guards—such a dear, and so handsome; I will tell you all about him when we meet. He is perfectly ravishing, that is the word. One must be particular about one’s adjectives in these *Saturday Review* days. I suppose you have heard about the Girl of the Period? They say I am one, but I am so happily constituted that I don’t care one bit what people say; I should have been dead long ago if I had—and I flatter myself I can say as hard things as anybody, if not harder. It is so nice to say unkind things, I enjoy it. Sarcasm is my *forte*, what is yours? I long to see you, and believe me I am quite looking forward to my country trip; it will set me up, and I shall go back as fresh as paint, of that I feel positive. Then I will be so good! In bed at ten, and up early drinking new milk without anything in it. No painting and plastering; I shall leave all my Rachel things at home, and perhaps get up a natural colour; won’t it be delightful?’

‘I shall bring a box of skates, for they say we are going to have ice. I hope you have some agreeable gentlemanly men at Lowersham to put on one’s skates, that is half the fun you know, and gives one such opportunities of flirting. I shall die if I have no one to flirt with; you really must provide me some one to flirt with and be spoons on. Don’t be shocked. I am not a help-the-poor, talk-twaddle, and narrow-path girl. I have built my little house on the sand. It is so much easier than climbing up to the rock, and though it is always toppling about my ears, I manage somehow to patch it up again. I am afraid the roof is full of holes, and the windows are all broken, and the door off the hinges; but I nearly hooked a man with ten thousand a-year at Paris. He is not off now, though he’s cool because he found me out with another fellow, and that is not so bad for an old stager.

‘I’ve been out three years now, and can’t call myself a young beginner, you know. If I land my big fish, I shall settle down and be quiet, though I have several years yet to play with, and can take the shine out of the plaster-of-Paris namby-pamby paper-faced girls, who come out year after year for no possible use that I can see, but to sit against the wall and see other people dance. Nobody wants them, they come, they go, like Tennyson’s brook, but where they go to is more than your humble servant can tell. They don’t marry into the

army, they are not absorbed into the country families. It's my belief they fall back on the church or the bar.

'By-the-way, I hope you have not burnt your mistletoe, though Christmas is over; you should always keep it in some unobtrusive place till Easter, it is so handy. You can get right under it, and call yourself a stupid when you find yourself clasped in some darling's arms, and say you had forgotten all about the nonsensical stuff. Good-bye, dear, till we meet, which will soon be, and believe in,

'Ever yours most sincerely,

'EVELINE ST. PIERRE.'

'What a funny letter!' exclaimed Ada, as she put it down, and allowed her mother to take it up.

Mrs. Mapleson read it very seriously, and then Edith read it. They were neither of them pleased with its contents. Mrs. Mapleson said—

'This is quite enough to prove to me that we have done wrong in having the girl here; but it's too late now to alter it, and we must guard against any probable evil. You are warned, girls, and if you become contaminated by your intercourse with this "Girl of the Period," as she calls herself, you will have only yourselves to thank. "Girl of the Period" indeed, she's a disgrace to the period, and I would tell her mother so if I could see her; however, we may be able to do the poor, half-mad creature some good. It may be a turning point in her career, and I will ask Mr. Lacy to preach from the pulpit against the follies of the day, so that her heart may be softened, and she may see the sinfulness of her deluded ways. Poor silly vain thing, she a "Girl of the Period!" I won't believe that she's a type, but rather an exception, and I thank heaven that my girls have been brought up differently. If that is all society does for its votaries, I would leave society, and live in a desert rather!'

The indignation of Mrs. Mapleson rather defeated its object with Ada, who began to feel a secret sympathy for her dashing and peculiar cousin. A wish to be like her took possession of her; she rather envied her than otherwise.

Going away to her own room, she read the letter again and again; each time it appeared less 'funny.' The style, the slang, became familiar to her, and she fancied she could almost sit down and write in the same way.

CHAPTER IV.

‘BREAKING OFF THE ENGAGEMENT.’

IN the evening she was astonished to hear Ernest Lacy announced; he had evidently changed his mind, or he had come to scold her. That she was resolved she would not submit to, nor was she inclined to make it up with him.

What would Eveline St. Pierre do under the circumstances?

That was the question she put to herself, and wished she was at her elbow to advise her. Somehow she felt ashamed of Ernest as a lover; Arthur Monteagle would have been much better, he was more presentable, there was an air about him which Ernest Lacy totally lacked. After a moment's consideration, she made up her mind to snub him.

Ernest entered hat in hand, and Ada, who had taken up a book—Blair's Sermons, by the way, which she held upside down without knowing it—pretended not to notice him.

Mrs. Mapleson and Edith received him with the old cordiality, and the former exclaimed—

‘Ada, my dear, here is Ernest.’

‘Well,’ she answered, petulantly, ‘I am not as large as a church, nor as small as a butterfly, but I suppose Mr. Lacy can see me.’

‘Don't speak so rudely to me, miss,’ answered her mother, angrily. ‘If you are not more moderate in your speech, and careful in your behaviour, I will send you to your room, and keep you there till your father comes home.’

Ada took up her book again, and deeming it prudent to be silent, took refuge in sulking. It is very annoying to be spoken to harshly before strangers. Ada felt her bondage, for such she called home constraint, painful in the extreme. The curb, when loose, she did not mind, but when it was tightened it galled her. She champed at the bit like an unruly steed. A little spark of hope burned in her breast—it was a hope that the future would bring forth something which could make life more pleasant and endurable.

Ernest talked to the mother and Edith. Mrs. Mapleson,

with her quickness, was not long in perceiving that an estrangement existed between Ernest Lacy and Ada. Resolving to have the matter cleared up, she exclaimed—

‘Have you fallen out with Ernest? If you have, I insist upon being made a mediator. State your grievance, Ada, and I will do my best to make matters up between you.’

Ada bit her lips.

‘I should think,’ continued her mother, in a more severe tone ‘that common courtesy would suggest the propriety of your giving me an answer, when I address you in such a pointed manner.’

‘Your extraordinary manner of addressing me confused me, and I do not know what answer to make you. I am not aware that I have given Mr. Lacy any intentional cause of complaint, certainly not sufficient to justify his sending me an insulting copy of verses, which I received this afternoon. If you dislike me, as you seem to do, pray tell me so, and I will not inflict my disagreeable presence upon you. I hope, at all events, that you will allow me to have a little spirit, and permit me to take my own part when it is necessary,’ replied Ada.

Mrs. Mapleson looked inquiringly at Ernest.

‘I did think I was treated badly this morning,’ he exclaimed ; when Miss Ma—Ada, I mean, went home with one of Underwood’s fellows instead of me, and I wrote her some verses, as she says, but I did not mean to be too hard upon her.’

Ada gave him a look of ineffable contempt. Oh, how she wished for Eveline St. Pierre’s championship and co-operation.

‘Will you forgive her, if she pardons you?’

‘Most willingly.’

‘Ada, you hear what Ernest says?’

Putting down her book, Ada answered, pettishly—

‘I have done nothing to be forgiven for, and I am not in a forgiving humour myself. If Mr. Lacy does not like to come here, as far as I am concerned he may stay away.’

‘But we are engaged!’ Ernest Lacy said in dismay.

‘I release you from your engagement, and am very sorry that it ever was made,’ she replied. ‘It is all over now. It is all at an end between us. I would not have you for a husband if the whole world were at stake. I never wish to see you again. I wish we had never met. I am thoroughly in earnest, and beg you will look upon this as conclusively final.’

Mrs. Mapleson stared at this outbreak, the like of which she had never before witnessed from her daughter. Ada would not stay for remonstrance, but rushed from the room and locked herself in her own apartment.

'What is the meaning of this, Mrs. Mapleson?' asked Ernest in consternation.

'I presume you know best. My daughter would not act in such a way without some provocation, whether adequate or no,' rejoined Mrs. Mapleson, who felt obliged to take her child's part, if she deserved it or not.

'I think under the circumstances I ought to leave your house at once, and—and consult my father.'

'You will do as you think fit, Mr. Lacy.'

'Good evening.'

Mrs. Mapleson bowed and rung the bell. Ernest took his leave, and without exactly knowing why, felt very contemptible; he had not felt so small in his life before. Certainly being thrown over by a woman to whom you are engaged, and whom you have looked upon as your own, is not calculated to place you on the best terms with yourself.

Edith a few minutes afterwards knocked at Ada's door.

'Who is it?' asked a faint voice from within, highly suspicious of sobs and briny tears.

'I, dear—Edith,' was the answer.

'You ca-can't co-come in,' said Ada, in a more broken voice, 'Let me a-lo-lone.'

Repeated applications were of no avail. Ada was determined to have a good cry all to herself, and she had it.

She cried herself to sleep and woke up in the morning all the better for it. On descending to the breakfast room she appeared to have forgotten all about the scene of the preceding night, and carefully avoided a *tête-a-tête* with her mother.

Eveline St. Pierre was to arrive that day, and if Ada had been at all inclined to indulge in the blues, this expectation would have thoroughly aroused her. Edith thought she was in rather higher spirits than usual, but as she had been so rudely repulsed the night before she did not venture again to offer consolation or invite her sister's confidence.

The doctor himself said he would go on to the station, distant about a mile, and bring the visitor back in his trap. As there was only room for two, he did not take either of the girls.

Edith went out, she had some poor people to call upon, she said, and Ada and her mother could receive Miss St. Pierre. Ada fully intended to do so, and waited for half-an-hour—the train was that much late—looking anxiously out of the window. At last there is the sound of wheels. The trap drives up, and Mr. Mapleson alighting assists a young lady to descend. In an instant, seeing her through the window, Ada knew what she had got on. As it may be interesting to the general reader, we will give a description of Miss St. Pierre, as she appeared on her arrival at Lowersham.

To begin with—she was a blonde of middle height, having a perfect wealth of rich golden hair. An enormous chignon protruded behind, and two plaits of hair went over her head, her forehead being partly covered with short curls. She had a pale pretty face and a very nice little mouth, which, with her chin, were her best features.

She wore a black velvet dress, not descending lower than her ankles, looped over a violet satin petticoat, a small crinoline and a beautifully pleated white petticoat showing under the other, together with a velvet jacket trimmed with light seal-skin—her hat and muff matched the expensive trimming of her jacket; her boots were high, with tassels; lavender gloves, about six-and-a-quarter, closely fitted her small and delicate hands.

Mr. Mapleson and she were chatting gaily, and seemed to be on the best of terms already as they drove up.

Ada went to the door to meet them, and as Miss St. Pierre touched her proffered hand without any warmth she attempted to kiss her, but was chilled and prevented by her cousin, who said—

‘Don’t kiss me, dear. It’s such a mockery. I detest humbug. I’m not a bit of a hum myself. Very glad to see you and all that, you know, but kissing is out of date among women. It is, indeed. Now tell me what I am to call you?’

‘Ada.’

‘A pretty name—my godfathers and godmothers were not so kind to me. Uncle, may I rely upon your good nature to see that my traps are put in my room? Thanks very much. Now, dear, I’m all your own. Hadn’t I better do homage to your amiable and pious maternity, and get all the disagreeables over, so that we can have a chat to ourselves in the delightful privacy of our own room? I shall have to unpack

myself as I have not even brought a maid down with me. Going to be quite rustic, painfully proper and industrious. Oh, yes! I shall be quite a pattern. Now for the pious maternity.'

'If you mean me,' exclaimed a stern voice at her elbow, 'I am here, Miss St. Pierre.'

It was Mrs. Mapleson, to whom Eveline turned, with a soft smile and a polished grace, saying—

'Ah, delighted I am sure,—pray don't give me a handle to my plebeian patronymic. I only like people to "Miss" me when I am gone—charmed to meet you—have often heard my mama speak of you, but can't call you to mind a bit, though I am told we used to see one another when I was younger—sad case of defective memory, isn't it? I have heard fellows say, there is nothing like accepting a bill to make one recollect a date—pity we can't invent something to impress the interesting features of relations upon the mind.'

'So you are really my niece?' exclaimed Mrs. Mapleson, who recovered her good temper, and was delighted to see her sister's child again. 'I should not have known you—and yet there is a likeness to your grandfather—a decided resemblance about the eyes. Yes, there *is* a family likeness. Come into the dining-room and have a glass of wine and a biscuit; you must be fatigued after your long and tedious journey.'

'Wine, yes and thanks; biscuit, no, spoil my lunch. The journey, I may tell you, was not a bit tedious, I had such nice companions, Algy Seyton and Dolly Lane; both going north, but changed at Rugby to please me. We smoked all the way. Never enjoyed myself more. Algy's an old flame of mine, and I have given poor Dolly a little encouragement lately, though I am obliged to snub him sometimes *pour encourager les autres*.'

'Smoked! Did I understand you to say you smoked?' exclaimed Mrs. Mapleson, in horror.

'Oh, dear, yes; cigarettes, Turkish tobacco, very mild though.'

'May I request that you will not indulge in such a pernicious habit in my house. The baneful vice might attract my girls, and—'

'Can't promise that. Impossible to cut the weed altogether,' replied Eveline St. Pierre, in a tone of mild remonstrance. 'I'll confine the "baneful vice"—capital phrase that, it will do

for the Guards' Club when I get back—to my own room and the open air, that's meeting you half-way, isn't it. Come now, you can't complain. On second thoughts I'll have the wine when I have taken my things off, with your kind permission. I am conscious of dirt and have a painful sense of being unclean about the hands and face. Ada, dear, may I trespass upon you. Chaperon me, I entreat.'

Ada led the way upstairs, where the groom had just deposited the last of her parcels and boxes, which were eleven in number.

'What a dear old house, quaint, and all that! Elizabethan for any money, stood a siege in Cromwell's time, and perhaps gave shelter to the Stuart! This is the sort of room to read Sir Walter Scott's "Woodstock," "Kenilworth," or "Ivanhoe" in,' she added, looking round at the oak panelling, the diamond-shaped panes of glass in the windows, and the old furniture, which would have driven Wardour Street mad with a wild greed.

'Do you like it?' asked Ada, who was slightly timid, and afraid to say much as yet to her cousin, whose freedom of manner, expensive and stylish dress, and high-handed way of addressing everybody rather alarmed and repelled her.

'Much. It is far and away better than the London brick-built barns.'

'Do you read?' inquired Ada, who was still anxious for knowledge.

'I have a vague idea of a few books, and if I don't read I say I do. If a man asks you questions, "Do you know this?" "Do you like that?" "Isn't the other charming?" all you have to say is yes or no; the latter generally has the most effect, for it knocks him off his centre entirely, and he has to think of something else.'

This opened up a new country to Ada; she had never dreamed of acquiring a reputation for being book-read so easily.

'The fact is,' continued Eveline St. Pierre, 'men don't care about very profound women. The more densely stupid you are the better you get on, if you have any "go" in you. If you haven't you had better shut up at once, you are no use in a London drawing-room. What do the men know after all? Take the average sort of army man one meets everywhere; he's been crammed, it's true, or he wouldn't have passed, but

he soon forgets the stuff and it's no good to him. If a woman begins talking deep, he's afraid of being asked a question he can't answer, that would make him look a fool at once, do you see? so he shies and cries off, and runs after any rattle that will chatter nonsense to him. I suppose you have a spoony man down here?'

'I had one,' answered Ada. 'But we have broken it off lately.'

'Given him the go-by, eh? Had he any coin?'

'I beg your pardon, what did you say?'

'Money, child, money. Current coin of the realm,' replied Miss St. Pierre impatiently, as she threw her jacket on the bed.

'Oh! no, nothing. It would have been purely a love match. His father is the clergyman here. You will see him, I have no doubt.'

'Only the parish parson!' replied Eveline, as if she were saying, 'only a day labourer!' 'You acted rightly, my dear. I can do something for you in town which will be a very great improvement on a clerical casual, as I may without irreverence call a clergyman's son who has nothing to look forward to, but I suppose a present curacy and a prospective living of two hundred a-year.'

'I thought I loved him,' observed Ada.

'And found on second thoughts that you did not,' replied Eveline, with a laugh; 'that is very often the case. Love, my dear child, love to distraction. Some women can't exist without loving something, but don't sacrifice yourself; always be ready to transfer your affections when a worthier object presents itself. An old man of sixty with twenty thousand a-year would be more my form than Adonis, five-and-twenty, no balance at his bankers, and possibly in debt. Still I don't mean for a moment to say that you are to deprive yourself of the society of young men—not a bit. They are to amuse yourself with when you have nothing better to do. *Pour passer le temps* when you are *distrain*, and now tell me, pet, what manner of men I am to meet at Lowersham.'

'There are the cadets at Mr. Underwood's.'

'That sounds well—go on, dear,' exclaimed Eveline, with a smile of satisfaction.

'Those we know are Arthur Monteagle—'

'Lord Chippendale's son—I have met him—poor as a rat.

Don't look at him, my dear. Seriously, I mean ; Chippendale's over head and ears—paper everywhere—in the *Gazette* soon. Who else ?'

'Reginald Hall, and Percy Kendal.'

'He's a likely lot. They're well off, the Kendals. He has a brother in the Guards—not the household brigade—and a very nice fellow he is too. I saw him last at the opera—oh, no. I glimpsed him in the park after that with a doubtful party, and cut him dead the next day ; but that may be forgotten now, and I daresay we shall be as jolly as ever when we next run across one another. Oh, how cold it is ! I am sure it must be freezing.'

'If it does we shall have capital skating on the Usk, that is what we call our little river,' replied Ada, who assisted her cousin to partially unpack one of her leather portmanteaus. Out tumbled all sorts of things, dresses, cosmetics, brushes, unguents, aquæ, and washes of all kinds ; which proved that the young lady had changed her mind as to leaving all her Rachel things behind her.

'Is that your sister coming up to the house ?' inquired Eveline, who was looking out of the window.

'Yes,' answered Ada, looking out too ; 'that's Edith. We are not very great friends—she is too steady for me.'

'Oh, I see. Not exactly cousins, eh ? don't pull together ? very often the case with sisters. How dowdy she is ! what do you think she has on ?'

'I know, because I saw her go out. A brown merino dress, and a tweed cloak, with a scarlet and black velvet bonnet, isn't it ?'

'Exactly : and there is some one with her who is still more judified. She's got on a common serge, a black straw hat, strong spring-side boots to go across country in, and some thing over her shoulders that looks like a sheepskin. I hope you don't guy yourself up like that.'

'Edie and I generally dress alike,' answered Ada.

'Do you ? I shall have to take you in hand, that's all. Now let me put just a little splash on my face,' she added, applying the powder puff vigorously to her cheeks, 'and I'm yours to command.'

Ada led the way downstairs, where they found Edith, who had brought Miss Peters home with her. She fancied that Miss St. Pierre put herself out of the way to be rude to the

lawyer's daughter. Lunch was on the table. The doctor was able to do the duties of host himself, which he performed with an old-fashioned fussiness quite characteristic.

'Don't forget, Evie, that you have come down to enjoy yourself,' said the doctor. 'You see,' he added, addressing the others, 'we are on a familiar footing already, Evie and I; that is the result of our drive this morning. Commend me to a country drive or ride for improving the good relations between the sexes—and I will say this, that I never had a more charming or vivacious companion.'

'Miss St. Pierre seems quite to have won papa's heart,' remarked Edith.

'And I may say that I was never better Jehu'd,' said Eveline. 'You tooled that old mare of yours along six or eight miles an hour, Mr. Mapleson, with a skill that a member of the Four-in-hand Club might have envied.'

'You are making fun of me and my cattle, that's too bad. I meant to have lent you the trap to dash about the country with, but now——'

'You won't! Never mind, I can walk, and it would only make a difference of an hour or two at the end of the day,' she said, with a sly smile.

The doctor took the *badinage* in good part, though she hit him hard, as the horse he was driving was quite patriarchal as regarded its age, and an awfully slow goer. He had given a ten-pound note for it, and it was a question in his own mind whether the beast was worth the money.

'I can see you pride yourself upon being satirical,' said the doctor. 'I'll be even with you. If I don't may I be snowed up in Russia. I can say sharp things sometimes, though the worst is I can't always think of them.'

'No!' cried Eveline St. Pierre, incredulously, 'you are not really in earnest; you would not break a poor little fly like me on the wheel? You are going to run away,' she added, as the doctor rose to go; 'what a thing it is to be a clever man. Do, pray, take care of yourself; haven't you got a comforter or a blanket to tie round you? Good people are scarce, and when one gets to a certain age, I am told, the cold penetrates.'

'Wait till you want the doctor,' said Mr. Mapleson, playfully shaking his fist at her, 'won't I serve you out? that's all.'

'You must have the chance first, and the only thing I am likely to trouble you for is a pick-me-up when I feel at all seedy.'

The doctor went away laughing, and the ladies were left together.

Miss St. Pierre's remarks were lively and interesting, and although some of her ideas shocked her hearers from their startling novelty, and were regarded as daring innovations, which ought to be stamped out at once with the iron heel of power, still she was amusing, and Ada began to like her.

Miss Peters and Edith decidedly did not like her, and they took little or no trouble to conceal the fact. When, after lunch—they were to dine later that day—Mrs. Mapleson ventured to ask Eveline if her chignon was her own hair. She replied—

'Coming from some people that would be an impertinence, but from you, my dear Mrs. Mapleson, I regard it as innocent curiosity, and as such proceed to gratify it. Nature has very little to do with the production of my chignon, which may fairly be looked upon as an effort of high art.'

'I wonder,' observed Miss Peters, 'how girls can like to be artificial.'

'I beg your pardon,' said Eveline, sharply; 'did you speak to me? Oh, you did. It certainly matters very little how you wear your hair. You are likely to attract just as much notice with a whisp of old hay tastefully displayed, *en arriere*, as you would if you had been for two hours under Douglass's fostering care. It is entirely a thing of carriage, and depends upon one's manner.'

Miss Peters coloured up, and Edith came to the rescue, saying—

'Mere personalities never convince in argument.'

'Don't they?' answered Eveline. 'Sorry for them, then.'

'I think,' continued Miss Peters, coming to the charge again, 'that it is possible for ladies to overdress, and pay too much attention to mere show, which is contemptible, especially to men.'

'Don't you make any mistake, my good creature,' rejoined Miss St. Pierre. 'That's just what men do like. Show, as you call it, is everything, so long as you match your colours, and don't glare or overdo it.'

‘Yes, it must not be overdone,’ observed Ada.

‘When I was young,’ put in Mrs. Mapleson, ‘I always found simplicity of attire most attractive. You know what the poet says, “Beauty unadorned is adorned the most.”’

‘That poet was a fool and a flat,’ answered Eveline; ‘all poets are when it comes to things of the world—they are all theory. You go into a drawing-room unadorned, and see if you won’t be fit to die with envy, hatred and malice, and all uncharitableness, when you see how others are got up. A girl may take to wearing sacks, if she likes, but she had best stop at home if she doesn’t want to be laughed at. There is quite a talk now about “Girls of the Period.”’

Miss Peters observed—

‘A London paper has been exposing the follies of the day, and saying that all girls are heartless, mercenary, and vain, but I think it very hard that the accusation should be so sweeping.’

‘Quite right,’ said Miss St. Pierre; ‘tar them all well with the same brush. You would be a Girl of the Period if you could, you are only mad because you don’t know how to set about it.’

‘I suppose you consider yourself one of them,’ replied Miss Peters, with a perceptible sneer.

‘I should scarcely consider you a judge,’ answered Eveline, returning the sneer, with marked emphasis. ‘If it came to a question of nursery governesses and upper servants why your decision might be valuable, but as to anything higher I must decline to receive you as an authority. I must indeed.’

Miss Peters bit her lips, and Mrs. Mapleson, trying to throw oil on the troubled waters, said—

‘After all, it matters very little so long as the heart is in the right place.’

‘Heart!’ repeated Miss St. Pierre; ‘what is heart?’

‘Being able to feel for others, and having an inclination to do your duty.’

‘Oh! that’s it, eh! Keeping your parents in their old age, and running away with your groom, out of pure pity because he tells you he is smitten.’

‘I hope the latter is not an accomplishment of a Girl of the Period,’ said Miss Peters, spitefully.

‘No fear. When we forge the fetters, they will be of gold, I can assure you.’

'Then you admit yourself to be mercenary,' Miss Peters exclaimed, with a sense of triumph.

'I have my price, simply that,' returned Eveline.

Miss Peters rose to go. She held out her hand to Miss St. Pierre, who drew coldly back, gathered up her skirts with a look of disgust, as if she feared contamination, and gave her a stiff bow.

When she was gone Ada said—

'How do you like our friend, Miss Peters? She is the only daughter of our solicitor.'

'It's very lucky he's got no more of them; she is repulsive to the last degree,' answered Eveline.

'Will you come out for a walk?' said Ada, after a disagreeable pause.

'Like a bird. We have an hour or more of daylight yet. Show me the lions, and we will take sweet counsel together.'

They dressed themselves and went out.

CHAPTER V.

'SILVER PINES.'

THEIR walk took them by the side of the river Usk, which was entirely frozen over, but it was thought that the frost had not been of sufficient duration to make the ice safe, so no one had as yet been found bold enough to venture upon its surface.

'A very nice walk is by the river banks to Silver Pines,' said Ada. 'But we have not time for it to-day, to-morrow morning if you like we will go.'

'With pleasure. What is Silver Pines?' inquired Eveline.

'An old castellated building which has belonged to the Mowbrays for years. About twelve months ago old Mr. Mowbray died, and the property goes, we are told, to a nephew, who has been in America almost all his life. He is expected home shortly to take possession of the estate, which is worth five thousand a-year.'

'A nice neighbour for you.'

'I hope so; we have not many.'

'It is arranged, then, that we go to Silver Pines to-morrow. The housekeeper will, I have no doubt, show us over the place.'

'Certainly.'

As they turned to go back, they heard a sharp cutting noise on the ice, which stopped suddenly, and a man exclaimed—

'That's far enough to win my bet, and as it's getting dark I must look out for holes. I'll just get my wind and then make tracks.'

'Arthur Monteagle!' exclaimed Ada involuntarily.

Hearing his name pronounced the young man looked up and saw the ladies on the bank, they having up to this time escaped his notice.

'You are surprised to see me on the ice, Miss Mapleson?' he exclaimed. 'Perhaps it was foolhardy, but I made a bet, and having a sure faith that I was not born to be drowned I took

a spin down to these willows. The bet was that I would not venture half-a-mile, and I've won it fairly.'

'You have now an opportunity of showing that devotion to the fair sex of which you are always boasting, Mr. Montegale,' said Ada.

'Pray point it out to me.'

'Escort us home, and as a reward for your gallantry I will introduce you to my cousin.'

'I should indeed be a recreant knight if I hesitated at the call of beauty,' he replied, sitting down and hastily removing his skates; after which he clambered up the bank and was introduced to Miss St. Pierre.

'I think we have met before,' she said with a smile; 'at Lady Guernsey's, was it not?'

'Oh! yes—very proud indeed to meet you again. Do you intend to stay long in the country?' he said.

'*Cela depend*. I have not made up my mind yet.'

'Perhaps that would not make much difference.'

'Do you mean to imply that I am a changeable creature?'

'Most ladies are.'

'Thank you for your good opinion of us.'

'It is not mine. It is the *Saturday Reviler's*,' he exclaimed.

'Oh! then you get your ideas from books, that accounts for their worthlessness. I was prepared to listen to you as an oracle, but when you descend to things so low, my dear fellow, you can't help talking bosh. I have a great respect as a rule for masculine intellect, but when its power is employed against women, I cherish a sublime contempt for it. Women should occupy a pinnacle of impunity. The queen can do no wrong, that is a fixed principle. So it should be said of women. Pray forgive me if I have been rude. The warmth of argument often carries me away with it. I said something about bosh, please think that I was alluding to you in the abstract.'

'Willingly. But your exalted ideas of women are not to pass without criticism. I can prove to you that a sponge cake is better than a woman.'

'I cannot admit a comparison between the animate and inanimate.'

'For the sake of argument. You say nothing is better than woman, that is your postulate; I grant it, but I say that when you are hungry, a sponge cake is better than nothing,

ergo, a sponge cake is better than a woman, or else there is no truth in a syllogism.'

'Very well,' said Eveline, laughing; 'the next time you come to see us, we will put you in a corner by yourself with a plate of sponge cakes; you shall pay dearly for your levity. You won't hear the last of your sponge cake argument in a hurry, I promise you, Mr. Monteagle.'

He joined in the merriment which he had occasioned and they went on toward Lowersham.

'So you have won a bet,' exclaimed Eveline, who could never be silent long. My size is six-and-a-quarter if you have more money than you know what to do with, but I cannot be guilty of country gloves. You must send to Houbigant or Pivet.'

'Out of the coach altogether. I have a man in the Passage de l'Opera, in Paris, who beats them out of the field. Quite a treasure, on my word; he will send me a box over soon, and I will drop him a line to tell him not to be forgetful of the requirements of a certain lady.'

'Thanks, if your box is not a myth.'

'How ungrateful! you shall see and believe. Noah's ark was not a more solid fact.'

'Mr. Monteagle is going to leave us soon,' remarked Ada.

'I suppose you go into the Foot Guards?' queried Eveline.

'No, the Rifle Brigade.'

'Ah! you intend to be a good boy, you will not keep horses, go on the turf, and be spoken of as the new plunger?' said Miss St. Pierre, laughing.

'I have a conscientious objection to plunging,' he answered.

'It is objectionable when it is done on paper.'

'What do you mean?'

'It is a matter of income. Those who can afford it may plunge, but those who can't had better shirk it, unless they want to make acquaintance with the interior of Constable's Hotel.'

'You are very severe, Miss St. Pierre,' replied Arthur Monteagle, looking a little annoyed. 'If I am not Plutus I do not affect Diogenes, nor am I exactly a Lazarus. I shall have to be careful how I arouse your hostility, for though you know how to wound, you do not seem to have the power to comfort.'

'It is a woman's mission, is it not?'

'I have heard so.'

‘In that case I have mistaken my vocation. Comforting is not much in my way. I would rather wound than heal,’ exclaimed Eveline.

‘That is candid, and I cannot help admiring candour. I refuse to be annoyed by your ill-natured remarks, and it shall be my pleasing task to endeavour to soothe your savage breast.’

‘I object to being taught by boys,’ said Eveline.

Arthur Monteagle bit his lip.

‘Perhaps, boys,’ he answered, ‘are less objectionable than many who are older. Do you remember Chatham’s famous answer to Horace Walpole, when he was taunted in the House with being young—he was Mr. Pitt then, and he said—“The atrocious crime of being a young man, which the honourable gentleman has with such spirit and decency charged upon me, I shall neither attempt to palliate or deny, but content myself with wishing that I may be one whose follies may cease with their youth, and not of that number who are ignorant in spite of experience.” The speech is a long one, and I should only weary you by reciting the whole of it.’

‘Thanks for being so considerate,’ said Eveline, adding, ‘better be friends; I won’t chaff you any more—we ought always to be tender to babies.’

‘There you go again!’ cried Arthur Monteagle. ‘Never mind, Heaven always “tempers the wind to the shorn lamb.”’

‘If the shears cut him in the operation, what then? It is possible to introduce too much of the *fortiter in re*.’

‘Prudence dictates that I should avoid your society, but I am bold enough to insist upon immolating myself at your shrine, and if you are not kinder I will solace my outraged feelings by sending you a spiteful valentine on the fourteenth of February.’

‘Which would go into the fire unopened.’

‘Not unopened. A woman’s curiosity would not let her consign it to the flames without having first read its contents.’

‘That is all you know,’ said Eveline; adding *sotto voce*—‘Ada, dear, ask Mr. Monteagle home to dinner.’

‘Certainly,’ replied Ada, in the same tone saying aloud—‘Will you favour us with your company at dinner this evening, Mr. Monteagle?’

‘I am afraid time will not allow it; I should have to go home and dress,’ he answered.

‘We will forgive the absence of the white choker and the

tails for once,' exclaimed Eveline. 'It is my first evening in a strange country, will you not take pity upon me? The slightest suspicion of the army will be acceptable. You are going to belong to the service, and you will redeem Lowersham.'

'From what?'

'If I should not shock my dear Ada, whom I suspect has sweethearts, I would say utter cadism.'

'Qualify it,' suggested Arthur Monteagle.

'Half-and-half Bloomsbury, will that do?' exclaimed Eveline, laughing.

At length Arthur Monteagle suffered himself to be prevailed upon to go home with the girls. Mr. and Mrs. Mapleson were glad to see him because they thought it desirable to encourage eligible young men. As Ernest Lacy had received his *congé* in a very decided manner from Ada, Mrs. Mapleson considered that it would be very much to her daughter's interest to be on with a new love after being so abruptly off with the old. He did not stay long, however, pleading that he had to read hard, and after a little music took his leave.

Eveline had dressed herself in a pale green satin, with apple blossoms and bouillons of white tulle, wearing diamond ornaments, which thoroughly threw the Lowersham girls into the shade. They wore white tarlatan dresses, Ada's being trimmed with red roses, and Edith's with common blue flowers; their ornaments were black velvet with pearls sewn on.

Arthur Monteagle was not so much struck with Miss St. Pierre's elegant attire as she had expected he would be. If anything, he talked more to Edith Mapleson than the others. The sisters felt themselves thrown into the shade by their cousin. Ada looked upon her as a superior being as far as dress went, and envied her accordingly.

The next day Miss St. Pierre did not fail to remind her cousin of her promise to take her to Silver Pines. It was a lovely morning for a walk; the ground was dry and hard, a clear frosty air blew with an invigorating freshness, and the sun shone out but not with any perceptible warmth. Eveline was well wrapped up, and so was Ada. They walked briskly, and at twelve o'clock reached the lodge at the bottom of the fine old avenue which led through the park to Silver Pines.

The house took its name from a clump of very fine pine-trees, standing on a hill in the centre of the park. These were observable some distance off. The house itself was very quaint and old. Eveline anticipated great pleasure from going over it; Ada had done so before, and was not able to share her cousin's enthusiasm, but she promised her a rare treat nevertheless.

The gate-keeper let them pass without asking any questions. Some children belonging to him came near her, but she pulled up the skirts of her dress and passed haughtily on her way without looking at them.

Arrived at the house, Ada thought it looked less deserted than usual, and said so to Eveline, who agreed with her and exclaimed—

'It has anything but the appearance of an empty house. Will it not be amusing if we find that the owner has suddenly returned, and that your old friend, Mrs. Marsh, the housekeeper, of whom you have been telling me, has not the power to show us over the premises.'

'Anything but amusing. I should call it embarrassing and disappointing,' replied Ada.

A ring at the bell brought Mrs. Marsh prominently into notice, and in reply to the ladies' request to be shown over the house, exclaimed—

'I am very sorry, miss, I cannot do so. Mr. Allison Mowbray came home from abroad yesterday, and he has given me no orders about tourists and sight-seers.'

'Dear me, how tiresome!' said Ada; 'my friend has come over expressly.'

'It is annoying, miss; but I need not tell you that I would do it in a moment if I could,' said the housekeeper.

'Oh, I know that, Mrs. Marsh, for I have to thank you for your kindness on so many former occasions. What is to be done?'

'Go back, I suppose,' said Miss St. Pierre. 'If the lord of the soil is such a bear, what else can we do? It is always the way with these *nouveaux riches*. New men are as a rule very repulsive. I always avoid a monied cad, a poor gentleman is far and away preferable.'

She did not wish any one to hear this brusque speech, and was a little astonished when she beheld a tall, gentlemanly man, dark as the night, with keen flashing eyes, short whiskers,

no beard or moustache, well-dressed, and having that air of perfect repose about him which is so characteristic of a gentleman, standing close to her. He had come out of the hall while she was speaking to the housekeeper, and as her back was half turned towards him she had not seen him do so.

Lifting his hat a little, he exclaimed, with a half smile—

‘Pray pardon me for introducing myself. I am the *novus homo* you have been denouncing in such eloquent terms. I should imagine your experience of newly-rich people must be of a very extensive kind, or you would not denounce them so bitterly.’

‘Not at all. You have the unenviable distinction of being the first I ever met,’ answered Eveline, who threw out her quills like a porcupine whenever she was attacked.

‘I have not the slightest wish to prolong the misery which the unsought interview—unsought, at least, on my part—must inflict upon you,’ he said; ‘but I had intended to say that I should feel proud if you would look over my poor place.’

‘There is no reason why we should not do that, though you heard me say that you were probably personally objectionable. I must explain that I had not the least intention that you should hear that remark. I have a way of saying odd things, and, feeling disappointed at not seeing your house after coming some distance, I allowed my ill temper to make me utter that which I should be extremely glad to recall, if I may.’

‘By all means; nothing would grieve me more than to lie under the ban of your displeasure,’ rejoined Mr. Allison Mowbray. ‘It is so rare now to meet with an out-spoken lady, that I will, if you will permit me, do myself the honour of showing you over the house, though from what I have seen of it myself I am afraid it will not realise your expectations.’

Miss St. Pierre accepted this offer, on the part of her cousin and herself, and Mr. Allison Mowbray begged them to come after him. They went over the house and saw all that there was of interest. The family portraits, the armoury, the chapel, and other rooms, which had acquired notoriety, were duly inspected. Mr. Mowbray chatted agreeably, and seemed to have forgotten his passage of arms with Miss St. Pierre, who thought she had treated him too harshly. When they once more reached the hall, he exclaimed—

‘I fear you have seen all now but the gardens, and they are not inviting in this inclement weather, though there are a few

camellias, and flowers of which I don't know the names, in the greenhouses. It will be no trouble to me to take you there, none whatever, if you have a taste for floriculture.'

'We will not trespass on your kindness any more,' replied Eveline. 'I have been much gratified at what I have seen, and envy you your house, Mr. Mowbray.'

'May I ask whom I have had the honour of speaking to?' he said. 'It gives me great pleasure to hear you say that you have been pleased; but although I am a firm believer in entertaining angels unawares, I have as strong an objection to anonymous angels as you have to *nouveaux riches*.'

'I forbid that—I interdict that. Not one word more unless you want to recommence the strife!' exclaimed Eveline. 'I have made a handsome apology—at least I thought so—perhaps it was not ample enough for you. I am not good at drawing back; I would rather stand my ground and give and take, till it is a foregone conclusion with one of us.'

'So I should think. If I may make the remark, you appear to have more of the wisdom of the serpent than the softness of the dove. But you have not yet gratified my slightly impertinent curiosity.'

'This is Miss Ada Mapleson, Doctor Mapleson's eldest daughter, and I am Eveline St. Pierre, better known in London than I am down here,' replied the vivacious young lady; adding, 'I should not be here now if it were not that papa was obliged to come home ill from abroad, and London is so dull at this time of the year. There is no gaiety till Parliament meets.'

This gave Ada a new idea of her cousin's friendship.

'You are good enough to say that you are under an obligation to me, Miss St. Pierre,' exclaimed Mr. Mowbray; 'you must now oblige me again by staying to lunch, which will be ready in the oak dining-room almost directly.'

Ada pulled her cousin's sleeve, and whispered, 'Say no—we do not know him well enough.'

Totally disregarding this advice, Eveline replied—

'I for one shall be glad—Ada, I think, will follow where I lead.'

There was something so very fascinating about the handsome stranger that Ada was glad of the chance of continuing in his society, though she felt that she sinned, perhaps, a little against propriety in doing so. The lunch was everything that the most fastidious could wish—Mr. Mowbray was *bon prince*,

and the charm of his manner won both the girls. He saw them part of the way home, and received an invitation to call, which he promised to do.

'You will see me before long,' he said; 'I know not a soul about here, having been abroad so long, and always unfriendly with my uncle, who kept me out of everything but the property, which he could not make away from me, as I was his heir-at-law, and he was unable to alienate the estate. I had intended to live the life of a hermit, now I may even be induced to plunge into all sorts of follies, keep a pack of hounds, and——'

'Marry!' suggested Eveline, with her usual impudence. 'That is the finishing touch with fast men, is it not? I suppose you are *blasé* like the rest of the men at seven-and-twenty. They all profess to be if they are not.'

'There you tread upon dangerous ground, Miss St. Pierre,' replied Mr. Mowbray. 'I have an ideal. It's realisation is difficult. Merely pretty girls are a mistake, they are like moonshine, merely bright and cold. Women who are old enough to know their own minds are much more to my taste than girlish insipidity.'

'I am almost bold enough to wish that I were a little older for your sake,' returned Eveline with a laugh.

'What would you call the age at which a girl becomes a woman?' inquired Ada.

'Seven-or eight-and-twenty, or thereabouts, according to the register, not to their calculation; a woman is never to be twitted with regard to her age.'

'You must have been treated very badly at some period of your career, Mr. Mowbray,' said Eveline, 'or you would not have such peculiar ideas.'

'I hope I am not peculiar,' he answered.

'Is a woman settled at that age?' asked Ada.

'If not then she never will be.'

'What a long time we shall have to wait, dear,' exclaimed Eveline, 'before we can hope to gain the serious opinion of Mr. Mowbray.'

'There are no rules without exceptions, and you shall prove it if you are ambitious of doing so,' he said.

'Oh, no. My heart is gone long ago,' exclaimed Eveline.

'That is what I am always told when I meet a really nice lady,' replied Mr. Allison Mowbray with a sigh.

'If the course of true love should not go smoothly in my

case, there will be a ray of hope, just a gleam, enough to say the sun shone and that's all.'

'The smallest of Cupid's favours will be thankfully received.'

'Now, good-bye, Mr. Mowbray; we can't take you any further; although there are no big brothers in the case, it is as well that we should part before the curiosity of the village gossips is aroused.'

He took the hint and there separated at the top of the High Street, the girls going back much pleased with their adventure. Ada was rather nervous about it, she did not consider what they had done quite proper; they had picked the man up in the country and had become on friendly terms with him without the necessary form of an introduction. It was so totally contrary to the circle in which she had been brought up, that her first thought was secrecy. It would be, she imagined, the wisest course to keep their conduct a secret from everybody; on the whole she was pleased. There is always a certain amount of pleasure to be derived from being naughty. It is a sort of bastard pleasure and has this drawback, it cannot be talked of openly. Still it is a pleasure. She said to her cousin—

'Of course, Evie, dear, you will say nothing at home about our Silver Pines' adventure?'

'Of course I shall say everything about it,' was the unexpected reply. 'When I get hold of a nice man I am not going to shut him up in a bandbox. I like to show him and trot him out. Mr. Allison Mowbray will make a stir, take my word for that. He is a big fish—*piscis major*—as one would say at the Zoo, and *pisces majores* always splash. We shall have the credit of unearthing him.'

'Mamma won't like it.'

'Then disagreeable as the process may be, she must do the other thing. I am not a school girl. Oh, here is the old party!'

In fact, Mrs. Mapleson was coming up the street towards them. She looked annoyed, and said, as soon as she got near enough—

'Girls, girls, where have you been? Dinner has been over I don't know how long.'

'Look at your watch, my dear Mrs. Mapleson, and I dare say you will be able to fix the time to the minute,' suggested Eveline.

'Where have you been?' cried Mrs. Mapleson, addressing herself this time to Ada directly, and disregarding Miss St. Pierre.

Ada looked at her cousin imploringly, as if asking her to be spokeswoman on the occasion. Eveline gladly accepted the unthankful office, and replied—

'To Silver Pines—we lunched there; very quietly, though. No turtle, no fiz. Just a mild glass of dry sherry and the wing of a chicken.'

'Lunched there!' echoed Mrs. Mapleson with surprise; 'with the bats and owls, I suppose?'

'Not in the least. We have no acquaintance with those ungainly night fowls. Our host was Mr. Allison Mowbray, a charming man, and already *au desespoir* about me.'

'The late proprietor was a Mr. Mowbray,' returned Mrs. Mapleson, looking puzzled. 'But the name of Allison is altogether new to me.'

'Possibly. It was new to me till this morning. I rather like it though. Pretty name Allison Mowbray. How would Mrs. Allison Mowbray look on pasteboard? It sounds well enough.'

'Ada, my dear, do you explain this mystery to me. I can hope for no rational explanation from Miss St. Pierre,' said Mrs. Mapleson, more despairing than ever.

'No occasion; none whatever,' cried Eveline. 'If you are in a fog I'll get you out of it. You see we went for a walk to Silver Pines. The housekeeper said we couldn't go over the place because the new proprietor had just come to take possession. All at once, who should pop out but Mr. Allison Mowbray himself, and he very civilly did the honours. I was prejudiced against him I frankly own at first, because I thought him too new, but he turned out very well. We asked him to call.'

'Can I believe the evidence of my senses?' exclaimed Mrs. Mapleson, loudly, and gesticulating the while; 'you two, un-introduced, allowed this man to force himself on your society? I never heard such a thing, what next?'

'I don't know. Not being a Cassandra or given to prophecies. Not the deluge, I hope—a marriage for choice, if anything must result; though all is perfectly safe at present, both Ada and myself being heart whole. My palpitating heart is in safe keeping, and Ada's fluttering, man-reflecting, lead-one-wrong superfluity is still in the parent nest.'

‘I must say, Miss St. Pierre, that your conduct is as eccentric as your conversation is peculiar. I do not blame my daughter for what has happened, it is you who are in the wrong, and I am sorry to say there is less excuse for you, from your wider experience, than there would be for her, as her knowledge of the world is narrower than your own. You should have declined this Mr. Mowbray’s profound civility, and have come home at once, when you found that the object of your walk was frustrated. I cannot say that you have acted wisely.’

‘We reverse things in town,’ said Eveline.

‘How do you mean?’

‘The girls run after the men, and I believe in the country it is the other way. I do not altogether approve of it, but the apathy of the sterner sex is such that their selfishness stands in need of an attack now and then from the light brigade. They want stimulating. I have found a man improved by a gentlehorsewhipping on an emergency, *a la* Lola Montes, though this remedy must be applied with discrimination and tact. Mr. Allison Mowbray has five thousand a-year, I am told, and I am sure he took quite a fancy to Ada.’

‘Did he?’ said Mrs. Mapleson, to whom this announcement placed the *escapade* in a new light. ‘Ah, h’m, perhaps there is not so much harm done after all. Come indoors and let us talk it over ; come indoors, girls, come indoors.’

CHAPTER VI.

‘THE TORCH-LIGHT PARTY.’

MR. ALLISON MOWBRAY was as good as his word. He called upon Dr. Mapleson a few days after the visit of the girls to Silver Pines. He was received with cordiality, and Mrs. Mapleson softened in her favour before the genial power of his manner. He announced his intention of living at Silver Pines, and hoped to give balls and parties, though they would be but the poor attempts of a benighted bachelor.

Arthur Monteagle and Percy Kendal came in while he was at the doctor's, and as the frost had lasted and the ice was now perfectly safe, a skating party was suggested. Mr. Mowbray sprang at the idea, and said, ‘Will you have a torchlight party and come to my house to supper. It is the sort of thing we should do in Canada or Nova Scotia.’

Eveline St. Pierre thought such a thing would be simply enchanting, and so did Ada. Mrs. Mapleson and Edith hum'd and ha'd, but eventually it was settled that on the following evening the party should take place, Mr. Mowbray guaranteeing to provide supper, and Percy Kendal said he would find the torches somewhere, though he did not exactly know where, but he would get them, even if he had to go to London for them.

Mr. Mowbray met the party at the place agreed upon for starting. Edith had invited Miss Peters, so that there were four ladies and the same number of gentlemen, that is to say, Edith, Ada, Miss Peters, and Eveline, to be escorted and cavaliered by Mr. Mowbray, Arthur Monteagle, Reginald Hall, and Percy Kendal. Mr. Mowbray at once placed himself by Miss St. Pierre's side, and begged permission to put on her skates. She was an accomplished skater she said, having learnt the art in Russia. The other girls could keep their legs tolerably well, and Arthur Monteagle did his best for Ada, while Percy Kendal exerted himself for the demure Edith, and Miss Peters fell to the lot of Reginald Hall. Away they started two and two, Mr. Allison Mowbray and

Eveline leading the way, the former holding a torch in the air, which cast a ruddy glare upon the smooth, black-looking ice.

'This is charming!' said Eveline; 'you are a benefactor to the human race, Mr. Mowbray, and I must compliment you upon your brilliant idea.'

'I am happy to think you are pleased,' he replied.

'Perhaps you think I ought not to be?' she went on, for Eveline St. Pierre was nothing if she was not disputative; 'are you one of those who hold that women ought to soar above trifles?'

'Little minds are amused with little things,' he answered.

'Am I to construe that personally; but no, you have had no opportunity of gauging my character unless it is conspicuous on the surface. Do you pride yourself upon your power to read character?'

'Sometimes.'

'What is mine?'

'A combination of excellencies, all that is good, unique, to the exclusion of all that is bad, and you are as perfect as a frail mortal can be,' he answered.

'Oh! very well,' said Evelina, 'if you are going to make a laughing-stock of me, I shall not pursue the subject. I must confess I like a man who is not afraid to speak his mind. If you tell a woman she is all good, you must take her for a fool. No woman is perfect. It is more easy for a man to be so than for a woman.'

Mr. Mowbray fixed his eyes upon her, and she met his glance in the torchlight glare. They were sad, scornful, intellectual eyes; marvellously powerful when he threw intensity into them. Now they seemed to be placed over her, like those of an exorcist commanding the seven deadly sins to depart at once from the goodly mansion that they had had the hardihood to sweep and garnish. She felt their power and quailed before them. Decidedly, Mr. Mowbray was a man to inspire a woman with respect, if not with love.

'Any one who took you for anything but a highly-intelligent woman, Miss St. Pierre, would make a great blunder,' he said at length.

That was all she could induce him to say. She was unable to get him to give a decided expression of opinion respecting herself. Sometimes women have their weak moments, and they long to know what men in whom they take an interest

think of them. To have one's character told is always agreeable in prospect, though the result may not be flattering. The vanity of most people will not allow them to think that they are very bad. So the ordeal is not dreaded, as few have the courage to say what they really think.

They continued their way, and Eveline started ahead as if to defy Mr. Mowbray to a race.

'Take care, take care!' he cried suddenly. 'I noticed a hole somewhere here as I came along. Pray beware, Miss St. Pierre.'

The warning came too late. Eveline had shot in front and was unable to stop the impetus she had given herself. Unfortunately, she was in the direct track of the hole, which had been broken so that the cattle might drink. In vain she tried to stop herself as the warning voice rang in her ears. She stumbled heavily over some rough pieces of broken ice which had become stuck fast, and fell head forward into the hole.

Just as she disappeared Mr. Allison Mowbray came up. The catastrophe was apparent at a glance. Shouting loudly for help, he bethought him what was most fitting to be done under the circumstances. Hearing the wild cry which Eveline had uttered ere she disappeared, and also being alarmed by Mr. Mowbray's cries for help, the men in the rear left their charges with a few hastily uttered words and made an effort to reach the spot. Percy Kendal was the first to arrive. To him Mowbray handed his torch, saying—

'Miss St. Pierre is under the ice. I am going to dive for her. Break the ice all round here about, if you can. If I don't come up, say —— But no matter. If ——'

Here he broke off abruptly again, and plunged head first into the icy-cold water, taking the direction in which Miss St. Pierre had disappeared. As it happened, there was another and a precisely similar hole to the first a dozen or more yards down. Mowbray knew that, but it was not known to Percy Kendal or any of the others who had now arrived at the spot. They waited anxiously for some signs of a re-appearance. Percy Kendal had taken out his watch and was looking at the minute hand. In reply to the questions with which he was plied, all he said was—

'Miss St. Pierre's gone under and Mowbray has gone after her.'

'By Jove! devilish plucky.' 'Hope to God he'll save her.'

'What can we do?' and such like phrases, broke from the spectators.

'Seventy-five seconds!' exclaimed Percy Kendal. 'A man can't live longer than that under the water, I should think. I am afraid it is a case. There is a strong stream in this bend.'

Suddenly, there was a faint cry lower down. Percy Kendal rushed off at once, and saw something dark holding on to the ice. He was just in time to sink on his knees and catch hold of Allison Mowbray, who, with one arm tightly clasped round the insensible figure of Eveline St. Pierre was clinging desperately to the rough and jagged edge of the hole, his numbed fingers scarcely able to do their duty, and his strength failing him every instant. Arthur Monteagle was on the scene almost as soon, and the pair were rescued from their perilous situation and laid upon the ice. Eveline was still as death, and Mr. Mowbray, who was bleeding about the head, almost immediately lost his senses. They were so decidedly nearer to Silver Pines than Lowersham, that it was decided to run to the former for assistance, which would come sooner than from the village.

This untimely occurrence threw a gloom over the party which nothing could remove. Percy Kendal had ascertained that both Eveline St. Pierre and Mr. Allison Mowbray still lived, by placing his hand over their hearts, and finding that they beat, though feebly. This was some comfort. The ladies had their skates taken off at once, declaring that they dared not venture any further after what had taken place, and in spite of the terrible nature of the accident which had just taken place, and the low desponding feeling it had produced, a few subdued compliments were paid to pretty feet and well turned ankles.

Mr. Mowbray's servants, on being informed of what had happened, came with a carriage, it being possible to drive along a road to within a few hundred yards of the river side.

This distance the sufferers were carried and driven off promptly to Silver Pines, where a medical man was in attendance, as a messenger had been sent off for him the moment it was feared that Mr. Mowbray was seriously injured.

The remainder of the party followed more leisurely, and they were glad to hear from Mr. Mapleson that Miss St. Pierre had only received a shock to the nervous system, from which a

night's rest would recover her. They had made her up a bed at Silver Pines, and having been attended to by the housekeeper, she fell into a deep sleep, from which the doctor would not allow her to be aroused.

Mr. Allison Mowbray's condition was much more dangerous. He had, it was feared, received concussion of the brain, and was certainly delirious soon after he was brought back. Mr. Mapleson decided upon not leaving him that night, so that Ada and her sister, with Miss Peters, were obliged to go to Lowersham with the cadets, the anticipated supper being postponed, as no one felt inclined to eat, drink, and be merry, while such a disagreeable ending to a party of pleasure had resulted.

Ada left word with Mrs. Marsh, the housekeeper, that she would be round the first thing in the morning, adding—

‘Be good enough to tell Miss St. Pierre that I would have stayed here if I had thought I could have been of the slightest use to her, which papa says I cannot.’

When they reached home Mrs. Mapleson, who had heard nothing from her husband, who had only told her that he was sent for in a hurry, but not specifying his destination for fear of alarming her, was much astonished at what her daughters told her.

‘I was afraid how it would be,’ the old lady exclaimed, in a dismal voice; ‘these unfeminine displays always bring their own punishment. Who ever heard of girls skating when I was young, and who would have dreamed of doing such a thing by torch-light? Bless me! it is a wonder you were not all drowned. The mercies of Providence are innumerable. Well! I will take care that this sort of thing does not happen again. If either of you girls dare to propose such a way of spending an evening I'll send you out as a governess.’

This was always a great and overwhelming threat with Mrs. Mapleson. The girls had been brought up in an independent school, and they had a horror of genteel servitude, such as was implied in the menace.

The night passed, and, almost at day-break, Ada was up and dressed. She put a few articles of the toilette in a bag, thinking Eveline would be glad of them, and set off to walk across the fields in the direction of Silver Pines.

She met her father as she neared the house; he had been up the greater part of the night, attending upon Mr. Mowbray, who was no better, and feeling in want of a

little fresh air he had come out to stretch his legs on the lawn.

'The girl is all right,' he said, in answer to his daughter's questions. 'There is nothing the matter with her, though she may say there is to excite sympathy. My apprehensions are excited on behalf of Mr. Mowbray, who is anything but well. When I left him just now he was delirious? I don't think, though, we need anticipate anything very serious—rest and time will pull him through—he has a good constitution, and youth is on his side.'

Ada felt naturally disturbed at this intelligence, and went up to Eveline's apartment. The young lady had not yet risen. She was awake, but had fallen back on her pillow in a state of dreamy lassitude. The entrance of her friend roused her, and she sat up in the bed, exclaiming—

'My dear good Ada, how kind of you! Tell me everything—my poor head is in such a whirl. What has happened?—who saved me?—what did I do? Your excellent father would give me no information last night, and Mrs. Marsh was as silent as a dumb creature.'

'I will not reply to your questions categorically,' answered Ada; 'but I will tell you in my own way what occurred. You and Mr. Mowbray went on in front, and it appears that you did not see a hole which had been made for the cattle to drink out of.'

'In I went, I suppose,' said Eveline; 'a regular cropper. It gives one a new idea of a diving-bell, doesn't it? Well go on. Mowbray took a header after me, didn't he?'

'He did, and you were both carried down by the stream under the ice; but providentially there was another hole lower down for the cattle, just like the other, and if it hadn't been for that you would have been drowned.'

'Bless those cows!' exclaimed Eveline, enthusiastically. 'I shall always entertain the highest respect for those interesting, but slightly sluggish, quadrupeds in future. I have been afraid of their horns, but now they shall toss me and welcome, if it would afford them any gratification.'

'The worst is to come,' answered Ada, seriously.

'I thought the worst was over when we got to the second hole; were not we extricated from our perilous position, as the newspapers say when a lady's dress catches fire and somebody puts it out?'

‘You were; but, unhappily, Mr. Mowbray got his head knocked about under the ice, and he is dangerously ill—so papa says.’

All Eveline St. Pierre’s frivolity vanished instantly, she became quite sober and sedate. In a voice that trembled a little with emotion, which she was either unable or did not care to suppress, she said—

‘He is ill—dangerously ill—and through me. Let me go to him—I must ask your father’s permission to nurse him through his illness—whatever is in my power shall be done. Oh, Ada, this is very sad—it was so noble of him to risk his life to save mine!’

‘Any one would think, dear, that you were interested in this handsome stranger,’ exclaimed Ada slyly.

‘It is not that. You think me a senseless, hair-brained, butterfly thing; incapable of feeling, without a heart, with no more warmth in my nature than a statue. Is it not so? Don’t be afraid of offending me. I know you think so. But I assure you I can feel deeply, and I do feel for Allison Mowbray. I have been near death. It is shocking to think of death. I shudder when I think that I might have gone down into the grave with all my sins on my head, for I have been thoughtless and giddy. This is the sort of thing which makes one reflect on the past. If Mowbray was to die, Ada, I should never forgive myself. I should accuse myself of being the cause of his death, and mourn him with the affection of a sister disconsolate for the loss of a dear brother.’

‘We must hope for the best, dear,’ said Ada, squeezing her hand.

‘I will hope; I do, I must hope,’ cried Eveline passionately; ‘and now, dear, if you will send Mrs. Marsh to me to help me dress, I will come down to the breakfast-room.’

Ada went away promising to do as she was requested, and in half-an-hour Eveline St Pierre, looking pale but otherwise in good health, made her appearance. She at once sought Dr. Mapleson, with whom she had a long conversation. She met him on the lawn, when he was finishing his constitutional, and as they entered the breakfast-room together, Ada heard her father say—

‘I wish to place no opposition in your way, Miss St. Pierre. If you think that you are called upon to look after Mr. Mowbray in his illness, which may be a long one, you are of

course at liberty to do so ; any one else would do it as well, though, that I must say.'

'There,' she exclaimed petulantly, 'that is what I did not expect from you, uncle. You see I call you uncle, though you Miss St. Pierre me, goodness knows why. The man is nothing to me. But you are like the rest of the world, narrow-minded, and will have it that a woman cannot do a generous action for a man without its springing from an interested motive. It is disgusting. I tell you again I don't care two straws for the man in the way you think I do!'

'People will talk,' said the doctor, with a quiet smile.

'Well, let them talk. If they can't make a better use of their tongues I am sorry for them ; a parcel of gossiping scandalmongering stupids, who call themselves Christians, go to church, and yet are never so happy as when they are taking away some poor woman's character, and imputing dishonourable motives to her.'

'No, no ; I did not mean to convey that,' exclaimed Mr. Mapleson. 'All I meant was that Mrs. Marsh would nurse him quite as well as any one else, and that people would say ill-natured things. You will do as you like, and I do hope you won't be offended with me. You are my niece ; you are staying in my house, and I am obliged to look after you.'

'Don't be in the least alarmed,' replied Eveline ; 'I can take care of myself. I am not at all afraid, but it seems a shame to me that I should leave this man to be looked after by strangers, when it was through me that he came to grief. I should have been drowned if it had not been for him. You have heard, of course, how I went under just as I was in full swing ; he dived like a beaver, and, God alone knows how, managed to save me. I never had such a narrow shave. I've been shied out of a trap, sent flying off a horse's back, and once I escaped by the skin of my teeth, as Algy Seyton said, when a hotel at Brussels, where I was staying, caught fire. Still, this affair of last night was more touch-and-go than any of the others. I must nurse him, Mr. Mapleson, or I shall never forgive myself.'

'Very well, my dear child. I say no more. Please yourself. Nurse him to your heart's content. There is one thing in your favour, he has no contagious disease,' replied the doctor, 'unless love, which is very catching.'

'You dare !' cried Eveline, playfully holding up her finger.

‘I am silent. It was a slip of the tongue, though I couldn’t blame him if he did fall in love with such a charming specimen of feminine beauty. If I were again a bachelor instead of an old married man, I don’t know whether I might not be tempted to——’

‘Make a fool of yourself,’ interrupted Eveline, laughing ; ‘is that what you meant to say, Mr. Mapleson ?’

‘Seriously,’ he added. ‘If you are in earnest in what you say, I will tell Mrs. Marsh that you intend to share her labours, which I trust will not last long. My professional skill, such as it is, shall be exerted to the utmost for our unfortunate friend.’

After breakfast Miss St. Pierre went with the doctor to the sick man’s room. An array of phials was on a table, and they were labelled with directions for use. Eveline was essentially a creature of impulse, and she had wished to do what she could for Mr. Mowbray because he had saved her life, but on reflection she saw that it would not be proper for her to assume the post she had solicited, and was forced to own that the doctor was right in what he said. This conviction came upon her before she had been five minutes in the room during which time the doctor was engaged in conversation with Mrs. Marsh. Advancing to him, she exclaimed—

‘Doctor, I have thought better of it. I see that Mrs. Marsh will be a more fit person to attend upon Mr. Mowbray than myself, and that I should only be laying myself open to criticism by assuming a place by his bedside.’

‘That is right, my dear child,’ he replied, with a smile of approval. ‘I felt sure that you would on consideration see that you were taking too much upon yourself. You can come over to Silver Pines every day and inquire about his health, or you can even see him should he wish it.’

Eveline was about to reply, when a sepulchral voice was heard proceeding from the bed ; its tones were very sad and mournful at first, but they got higher and shriller as he proceeded until they culminated in a perfect shriek.

‘I saw him die,’ the sick man exclaimed, ‘but no one can accuse me of his death. I had followed him about for years, until he died. Who shall say that I was the cause of his dying ? It is false, sir. Stand back, or, by heaven, you shall share his fate. I have worked for this, and neither man nor

devil shall rob me of my reward. Beware, Dagley, beware ! I am not a man to stick at trifles, I would slay you where you stand if you dared to utter one syllable to my prejudice. No one can prove I killed him. No one, I say, no one.'

These words, which were uttered in the height of delirium, struck a chill to the hearts of all who heard them.

'Poor fellow ! his mind is wandering,' said the doctor.

'How weird and mysterious were his words,' remarked Eveline ; 'do men always talk like that when they are light-headed ?'

'Delirium makes a man say all sorts of things.'

'By chance may they speak the truth ?'

'Certainly, if a man has a secret he is pretty nearly sure to talk about it. I have heard of a murder being discovered that way. The sick man, in his delirious ravings, uttered sufficient to put the detectives on the scent, and when he recovered he was very quietly handed over to Jack Ketch, that is to say, he was tried and all that, first.'

'How strange !' murmured Eveline.

'Now, my dear young lady, by your leave, I will take you downstairs again. One moment. I must give instructions to the nurse about his medicine.'

Talking to Mrs. Marsh in a low tone, the doctor went to the door and held it open for Eveline to pass through. She did so. The sick man was quiet enough now ; he had ceased talking and gesticulating, and was lying perfectly still, breathing heavily, with his burning eyes fixed on vacancy. Eveline cast a pitying glance upon him as she quitted the apartment, and wished that propriety would permit her to tend him with a woman's gentle ministration.

Ada was surprised to see Eveline again so soon. It was with considerable chagrin that she had made up her mind to lose her cousin's pleasant society for a while, that is to say, until Mr. Mowbray got well again.

'Is it you, dear,' she exclaimed, her voice betraying the agreeable surprise she felt.

'Yes—I have, with characteristic capriciousness, given up my Crimean campaign, and am not going to rival Miss Nightingale,' she said.

'We must not be astonished at anything a Girl of the Period may think proper to do,' said Mr. Mapleson.

'Very well, doctor ; I owe you something for that, and I will

cudgel my poor brains to see if I cannot start an idea, which, in its execution, will astonish even you,' rejoined Eveline.

'If you do I'll forgive you,' he exclaimed.

'Will you? Then it's a bargain.'

There was more in this flippant conversation than he had imagined. A short time convinced him that Miss Eveline St. Pierre was quite capable of doing something which not only could, would, but actually did astonish him.

The doctor having to return to Lowersham, after doing all that he could for his patient, drove the girls back with him.

CHAPTER VII.

'THE VALENTINES.'

DOCTOR MAPLESON attached no importance to what Allison Mowbray had uttered in his delirium, but Eveline could not get it out of her mind. It seemed to her that he had at some period of his life committed the awful crime of murder, and that he was a terrible as well as a handsome being. This gave him increased interest in her eyes. She had never heard that of any girl of her acquaintance being admired by a man who was suspected of having murdered any one. It was very horrible certainly, but then it was alarmingly romantic. She determined to encourage him more than ever when he got well, though she was convinced she would always tremble when alone with him.

She made Ada her confidant in the matter, and Ada did not like the idea at all of having such a man for a sweetheart. 'But then,' she said, 'it may be all nonsense after all.'

'It may be moonshine,' assented Eveline, 'but I don't think it is. I don't know how murderers look generally, but there is certainly an air of mystery about him. He's done something. His career has been an adventurous one. Fancy listening to the words of love from a man who has defied the laws of his country, and stands in danger of being hanged.'

'How ghastly!' said Ada.

'Not at all. That's where you're wrong,' continued Eveline. 'It's a novelty. I have had admirers in every grade of the peerage and army—a son of a duke, an earl, a lord or two, heaps of honourables, baronets, and such small fry, a general, three colonels, lots of captains, and subs of all kinds. A cornet in a swell Hussar regiment shot himself because I snubbed him, and a sea captain disappeared and was never heard of again, simply because he popped, and I said I wouldn't have him. But I never had a pet assassin, a man who—delightful wretch—has perhaps killed a man in a duel or done something to lessen the census, out of jealousy or revenge. That's a glorious

passion, revenge. I can fancy myself with a Venetian dagger in my hand. If any one offended me—wouldn't I——'

'My dear Evie,' cried Ada, 'where are you getting to? your fancy is running away with you.'

'Pull up the curb a hole or two then, and tighten in the kicking strap.'

'What does that mean?'

'You didn't know I was horsey?' said Eveline. Oh, yes. I used to be awfully given that way, but I've altered it lately, such was the force of popular opinion brought to bear upon me.'

'Was not Dagley the name Mr. Mowbray said in his wild dream?' asked Ada.

'Yes, Dagley. There is a name for the villain of a sensational novel. Dagley! I'm sure I could love Dagley,' replied Eveline, lost in admiration at this new candidate for her solicitude.

'I wish I had your good spirits and could turn everything into ridicule. You can make light of serious affairs without an effort. I don't believe you really are so bad as you make yourself out though, or you would not have been so concerned for Mr. Mowbray.'

'Was I cut up about him?' said Eveline, carelessly; 'I can't help being weak sometimes.'

She was evidently in a contradictory mood.

'Tell me what you meant when you said to papa that you would do something to surprise,' concluded Eveline.

'That is a great secret,' answered Eveline, mysteriously. 'I will tell you that when we dress for dinner; shall we dress together?'

'With pleasure, and will you lend me your black silk, the one trimmed with white, that I admire so much, and those pretty pearl ornaments.'

'If you are good,' replied Ada, with a patronising smile.

Ada knew no peace until the time came to dress for dinner. Then she had her things carried into her cousin's room and the important operation commenced. Eveline locked the door very carefully and said—

'Now you shall know all about my great plan. I have plenty of money, that is to say quite as much as we shall want, and I propose that we leave here without saying a word to any one and go and live by ourselves in Edinburgh or some remote

place. All sorts of conjectures will be made about us, rewards will be offered, the thing will get into the papers and we shall be given up as lost sheep. It is the the quickest and cheapest way of gaining notoriety I know of. Of course we shall turn up at last, be forgiven by our sorrowing relatives, and very generally looked up to as eccentric girls.'

'Oh!' answered Ada, 'I should never dare to do that, at least not for any length of time. I would not mind going to Birmingham, let us say for a day or two, leaving a letter behind telling everybody not to be anxious. It would kill mamma if she did not know where I had gone.'

'Very well,' said Eveline carelessly, 'I shall do it, I think, but not just yet—in a week or two—eh?'

Ada made no distinct promise that she would rush into this mad scheme, but her cousin was gradually acquiring power over her, and she did not give a refusal.

The one who hesitates is lost, and Eveline knew that she could do what she liked with her.

February had commenced, and St. Valentine's Day was drawing near. That eventful occasion generally brings more excitement to country girls than those who live in London, though it is welcome to both. Eveline expressed a great contempt for valentines generally, but she admitted that she should like to receive a particular one, though she would not tell from whom.

Edith did not say much, but she coloured up whenever the fourteenth of February was mentioned, which excited Eveline's curiosity. Thinking that Ada was much more likely to gain her sister's confidence than she was herself, she asked her to discover the reason why she looked forward to the fourteenth with emotions which were evidently pleasurable.

Ada did so, and Edith in a weak moment admitted that Percy Kendal, with whom she had been carrying on a very quiet and legitimate flirtation, had promised to send her a valentine on the fourteenth which would express his sentiments much more accurately than he could do by word of mouth.

'I don't mind telling you, Addie, dearest,' continued Edith, who in love matters belonged to the gushing school, 'that I am sincerely attached to Percy though he has not spoken openly to me as yet. I have told mamma and she very much approves of my choice. I have no reason to believe that Percy is trifling with my feelings. I don't believe he is, but a little doubt will

creep into my mind sometimes which disquiets me. I expect this valentine will clear up everything, and perhaps through it he will declare his real sentiments. I did not tell you all this before because I am rather afraid of Eveline; she is fond of turning things into ridicule. Like a traitor as she was, devoted hand and foot to the enemy, Ada went and basely revealed the secret to Eveline.

'Oh! that is it,' said the latter, 'we must have some fun out of this. I will make all sorts of violent love to Percy Kendal, so as to cause her to be awfully jealous. Then we will get hold of the valentines before they are distributed; there will of course be one for her, and from Percy, this we will open by putting the adhesive over some warm water—I have seen that trick done before—and slip an ugly valentine in it while we take out the pretty one intended for her. The latter I will insert in a cover for myself, and let them be given away as usual. It will be a joke to see Edith's face—we shall have made it rather acid for her.'

Ada thought this would be scarcely justifiable, but she could not help smiling at the dismay which would be occasioned to the demure Edith.

'Don't you think it will be rather too bad?' she said.

'Not I, we shall put it all square at last,' answered Eveline.

'What an imagination you have! I should never have thought of such a thing.'

'Not a bad dodge, is it? I owe her a grudge and should like to pay her out, for taking the part of that odious cat with the oyster complexion and almond eyes—what's her name?'

'Miss Peters.'

'Yes, the woman who writes rhymes and calls them poetry.'

That evening Percy Kendal looked in at the doctor's—he was always welcome. Mrs. Mapleson made a great pet of him, and quite took him under her fostering care. When he shook hands with Edith, his grasp was longer and more cordial than it was with any one else. They sat on the sofa too, side by side, looked at one another without speaking, and when their eyes met they both blushed, and then their eyes fell and they laughed. This was a sure sign that they were in love, especially Edith, who looked positively spiteful if he took much notice of either of the other girls.

After tea Eveline said, 'Do you play chess, Mr. Kendal?'

'Yes,' he answered, 'I am very fond of it;' adding to Edith, 'Is it a favourite game of yours?'

'I don't know how to play,' she answered.

'In that case, I presume, I may ask you to play a game with me without doing anything very wrong,' continued Eveline, with a sly glance at Edith.

'How can there possibly be anything wrong in your making such a request?' asked Edith.

'Oh! I didn't know. One is always afraid of treading on dangerous ground,' Eveline answered, with a mischievous look in Ada's direction.

Ada, being a firm ally of Eveline's, got the chess-table out and a set of ivory men which reposed safely in a deal box. Percy sat on the sofa and watched these operations as if he scarcely knew whether he might or might not accept the challenge which had been so bravely thrown out to him by Miss St. Pierre. As for Edith, she sat still and bit her lip. Her hands which were crossed trembled a little, and there was a dangerous troubled glance in her eye.

She felt very uncharitable just then. We have heard clerical directors of consciences tell their lay friends from the pulpit to put off the old Adam. Edith might have been told to put off the old Eve, for she was in anything but a good mood. She was too worldly-minded, and hated Eveline for a time. That night when she knelt down by her bedside, as was her usual custom, and said her prayers, she prayed heartily for forgiveness, acknowledging her error, and professing penitence. She knew it was wrong to hate anybody, but Eveline St. Pierre was so mischievous, and had such an accomplished knack of tantalising everybody who laid themselves open to the lash of her genius, and deriving amusement from others' pain.

When Eveline saw Ada making these preparations, she exclaimed, 'I cannot compliment you on your gallantry, Mr. Kendal.'

'Why not?' he asked nervously.

'You are letting a lady do your duty; look at my dear friend Ada, fagging herself to death for us.'

He was compelled to rise now and offer his services, whether Edith liked it or not, and he placed the table in its proper position, afterwards arranging the chess-men, saying, 'Will you have white or red, Miss St. Pierre?'

'Red, I think, if I may, and, of course, you give me the move? Do we play for gloves, six pairs?—my size is six-and-a-quarter—all gentlemen take eights, I believe.'

'It is premature to go into that question, we do not know who may be the conqueror yet,' he said.

'Oh! you, of course. A lady can never pretend to play chess against a gentleman. Do you profess to be a good player? are you a professor?'

'I play a good game.'

'Then I know what I have to expect—never mind, I begin. See! I move my Queen's pawn; what is your little game?'

Percy Kendal moved, and the game went on with varying fortune for some time. Percy was a most fatiguing player, fatiguing, that is to say, for his adversary, he was such a long time before he could settle in his own mind how he ought to move; he would look here and look there, and calculate the chances of this move as against the chances of that, until Eveline was fairly driven mad with impatience. Edith remained on the sofa, and her distress increased every minute; she was afraid, poor silly child, that Eveline by her impudence, her brilliant conversation, and her fascinating manner, would rob her of her lover, and she sat on thorns until the game was finished, which it was rather unexpectedly.

'Check!' cried Eveline triumphantly, 'I have caught you at last. I thought I should if you went humbugging about after that castle and neglected her majesty.'

Percy in dismay looked at the knight and bishop, which had by their secret advance placed him in such an awkward predicament. It was as clear as daylight that he had no escape out of it, but he did not despair, and kept looking in all directions like a barn-door owl after a mouse, and could find no loophole. Still he would not give it up. Irritated beyond endurance by his vacillation and delay, she gave the table a push and sent the men flying to all parts of the room.

'You must be a blind bat,' she said, 'if you can't see that you are out of the coach. It's A B-C to a child; I've no patience with you.'

He sat still and stared at her.

Mrs. Mapleson—the doctor was out as usual, looking after some obstinate pauper who would be ill in spite of experience—looked up, and seeing what had taken place exclaimed—

'Eveline, Eveline, you forget yourself sadly.'

'If we are rustics,' remarked Edith, glad of a chance of revenge, 'we at least know how to behave ourselves.'

'Which is, as much as to say I don't,' exclaimed Eveline laughing; 'perhaps you are right. Don't ring the bell, Ada. I'll pick the things up or I'll toss Mr. Kendal to see whether he or I do. You need not bring up a servant to show what a beastly temper I have. Now, Mr. Kendal, here is half-a-crown, I am going to put it down. It's either man or woman, which will you have?'

'If we must leave the decision to the arbitrament of chance, though I should be glad to take the task of collecting the men upon myself, I should say a man.'

'And it's a woman,' cried Eveline; 'you should never desert the sex, Mr. Kendal. Always stick to the ladies and you won't go far wrong.'

Her musical laugh rang through the room, and Arthur Kendal began to pick up the chess-men.

'I won a bottle of fiz like that once at Richmond,' continued Eveline. 'There were some men in the Guards there whom I knew. I had gone down, I must tell you, with Lady Mary Sanders in her brougham. Algy Seyton, of whom you have heard me speak in terms of well-merited rapture, as the darling of his day, tossed me for some fiz. I beat him, and have often done it since then. I always have sudden death—that's one toss up and one cry, you know. You will hardly believe it, but going home that day—I wanted to go home outside the Guard's drag but my chaperone would not let me—I actually tossed dear old Lady Mary in the brougham for her Etruscan earrings, and won them; then she staked her emerald and diamond bracelet against the Etruscan earrings and my pearl drops. I won again. Never had such a run of luck, never. After that I set what I had won against her two rings and a locket she had, and pulled that off as well. I was in rare form that day. The old girl became quite an inveterate gambler. I shouldn't wonder if she has not succumbed to the charm of Tommy Dodd, that's another form of tossing in which the odd man stands out. But I suppose all this is as interesting to you as table turning, and makes you feel as riley as if you had gone to church and found no candles on the altar, and were told that the nightgown boys had run right clean out of incense. Don't be shocked at the name I have given to the boys in white; you must admit that

they look as if they were going to bed. I don't mind if you are riled. I like to show my nasty temper, as Algy Seyton calls it, and if everybody liked me people would at once say that I had no character, and as for ritualism—but that is forbidden ground, I must avoid that. If I said I did not cotton to the tremblers on the brink, I should be excommunicated by cousin Edith, whom I caught this morning working I.H.S. on a new altar-cloth for Mr. Lacy.

During the time Eveline was rattling on, Percy Kendal had succeeded in picking up the chess-men which he placed in the box prepared for them.

'I will not own myself fairly conquered, Miss St. Pierre,' he exclaimed, "I did not quite see that check-mate.'

'Didn't you?' replied Eveline, with her habitual impudence. 'If you want the gloves you can have them. I believe my credit's good, if I have no money.'

'I am sure it was not with that motive that I—'

'All men are mercenary, Mr. Kendal,' said Eveline, cutting his explanation short. 'Don't trouble yourself to say anything pretty to me; it will be quite thrown away, and the more polite you try to be to me, the less agreeable you will make yourself to Edith, who is dying with vexation to think you have cut her so long.'

"I, not in the least!" exclaimed Edith, endeavouring to look unconcerned.'

'My dear child, I don't want him, you are perfectly welcome to him. I was in the humour to make use of him half-an-hour ago, but I always throw my toys away when I am tired of them, and they bore me,' said Eveline in a low tone as she passed by Edith's sofa on her way to the piano.

Soon afterwards Eveline, who was an accomplished musician, struck up some sparkling melody which filled the room with sweet sounds. Under its cover, Percy Kendal tried his hardest to make peace with Edith, but she, in a rage with Eveline, which was greater because she could not get the best of her, vented her anger upon the unfortunate cadet, who got woefully snubbed.

When he rose to go, which he did about ten, Eveline took occasion to say to him, as he wished her good-night—

'It's hard lines you should be sat upon because she can't have it out with me.'

He smiled faintly, and went away very miserable, deter-

mining to come the next day to Mr. Mapleson's and give Edith a present of some sort, as a means of making it up. The best of lover's quarrels is, there are always a number of doors open through which a reconciliation can be effected, however serious an aspect the affair may wear.

On the morrow he purchased some trifle at a milliner's shop, and brought it himself to Edith, who thanked him with a smile as she accepted the peace offering, but took occasion to say—

‘I shall expect the real *amende* on the fourteenth.’

He nodded, and laughed acquiescence ; and took a great deal of trouble to buy a really nice valentine ; inside which he wrote a variety of pretty things such as, ‘Love me, leave me not.’ ‘*Je vous aime avec tendresse*’—and several couplets from a book of stock quotations, which enables you to express your opinions in verse on every subject, from ‘pitch and toss to manslaughter,’ as Arthur Montegale said, when he got hold of it one day.

Early on the morning of the fourteenth of February the conspirators were stirring. Edith happened to be a very sound sleeper, and would not wake for hours after the proper time if she were not called. The cousins had kept her up till late, talking about the probable success of a Baptist Sunday-school, lately started in the parish, in opposition to the Establishment, which was a subject in which she took a decided interest. They bribed the house maids with half-a-crown a-piece not to call her at all that morning, and going downstairs at half-past eight, waited in the hall for the arrival of the postman.

In the library, which was a room to which their mother seldom penetrated, and where they thought their nefarious operations would be uninterrupted, they had a jar of hot water, and an envelope of a large size, which Eveline had received through the post a few days before, and which she intended to use on this occasion.

The postman was intercepted at the door, and willingly gave up the letters to the young ladies, thinking he was not guilty of any harm in so doing, and they ran at once into the library, and locked the door behind them.

Mrs. Mapleson saw them go along the passage at a quick pace, but she did not think that they were doing anything very wrong. Her mental comment was—

'Those two girls are up to some mischief or other. Giddy creatures! Ah, well, they cannot always be grave!' and with this philosophical remark she poured out the tea and waited for their re-appearance.

Some minutes elapsed, and they did not come, so she rang the bell, and said to the housemaid who replied to the summons—

'Do the young ladies know that breakfast is ready?'

'Miss Ada and Miss Eveline do, ma'am, but I have not seen Miss Edith,' answered the maid.

'In that case go and call her again; perhaps she has overslept herself. I never saw such a girl to sleep.'

The servant, who was not one whom the conspirators had cautioned against awaking Edith, went immediately and did as she was told. Edith at once began to dress herself.

While she was thus occupied Eveline St. Pierre and Ada lost no time. A large square envelope, addressed to Edith in a man's handwriting, was the only epistle there was for her. This was evidently the one expected from Percy Kendal, and it was placed over the hot water to loosen the cement, there being no sealing wax employed in holding it together. This was rapidly accomplished.

When the envelope was opened the contents were extracted, and a hideous, garish thing in colours put in its place. This represented a cross old maid, ugly, badly dressed, and underneath were some vulgar opprobrious lines. The girls had purchased this detestable valentine for twopence at a shop in Lowersham. The envelope was sealed again and dried before the fire. The handsome valentine, the offering of Percy Kendal, was put into the envelope we have alluded to, as one received a few days previously by Eveline, and which had been carefully opened to save it for its present purpose. When this metamorphosis was complete the girls ran back to the breakfast room, and throwing the letters down on the table, Eveline exclaimed—

'The postman has just come and here are the letters.'

'Letters!' exclaimed a voice in the doorway. 'Is there one for me?'

It was Edith, who had never dressed herself so quickly before. The thought of it being Valentine's day had caused her to make extra haste.

'Yes, dear,' answered Eveline, in a hypocritical voice. 'Here is one for you, and, yes—one for me; let us open them together.'

Edith made a sort of eager snatch at the letter, as if she did not want any one to see the writing, but Ada exclaimed—

‘That is Percy’s elegant fist. I wonder what he has sent you. There are none for poor me, what shall I do?’

‘Look on and long, while we open our respective missives,’ replied Eveline, throwing herself back in an arm-chair near the window, and some distance from the breakfast-table.

Edith came near her to get the light from the window, and they opened their valentines almost at the same moment. Of course a handsome one fell out of Eveline’s envelope, profusely ornamented with the initials P. K., which no one could mistake for Percy Kendal, if the handwriting had not been evident enough, which it was.

‘Dear Percy,’ she murmured, ‘how kind of him!’

Edith was literally astounded when she beheld the nauseous, disgusting caricature with which she had been favoured. The lines were of the commonest doggerel, and the whole thing of the most vulgar description. What, for instance, could she think of—

‘I wish that I had sooner known
How ugly you have lately grown,
You are so cold, and stiff, and prim,
And so precise in every whim,
That I am very much afraid
You will die a grim old maid.’

There was neither sense, rythm or fun in these wretched lines, more repulsive stuff she had never seen. Could the gentlemanly, if not the refined and polished, Percy Kendal have been guilty of such grossness? She could scarcely believe it possible, but while she hesitated to give it credence she turned to the envelope, and there was his handwriting. How could she hesitate after this?

‘Poor Percy! It is another case of misplaced affection,’ said Eveline, as if talking to herself.

Edith crushed the valentine indignantly in her hand and cast a look of unutterable hatred upon her cousin.

‘Anything unpleasant, my dear?’ asked Eveline with a glance of mock sympathy at Edith.

‘No, no!’ answered Edith, repressing a choking sob.

‘Look at this. Is it not kind of Percy Kendal. Poor boy, I did not know he was so spoony on me. I thought he rather affected you.’

Eveline handed her the handsome valentine she had stolen from her.

This was more than the unhappy girl could bear. She threw the valentine from her as if it had been an unclean thing, and rushed from the room weeping bitterly.

'Come, girls,' exclaimed Mrs. Mapleson, 'you have wasted time enough in looking at those gauds. Breakfast is waiting.'

'One moment, ma,' said Ada, adding in a lower tone, 'Have we not gone a little too far? Poor Edith! she will break her heart.'

'I should like her to see Percy Kendal before the joke is explained,' answered Eveline.

'Oh! no; do let me go and explain it to her now,' returned Ada, who really felt for her sister.

'As you like. Go and smooth her over as well as you can. I leave the affair to you now,' said Eveline, going to the table, and continued, 'Coffee if you please, a little sugar, and plenty of milk. I believe in cows to the extent of milk.'

Ada made some excuse, and with the valentine in her hand, sought her sister who had taken refuge in her room, and thrown herself on her bed in an agony of tears.

'Don't cry, Edie dear,' said Ada kindly. 'It is all right, we have only been playing with you. The valentine Evie had was from Percy, and we put the ugly one in an envelope for you. He had nothing to do with it; see, here is your own valentine.'

Edith sprang from the bed and seized it with eager hands, gazing upon it with rapture which she did not take the trouble to disguise.

'Oh! but it was wrong of you,' she cried. 'It was wrong of you, and I will never, never forgive either of you for having trifled with my most sacred feelings. It was too cruel of you, too, too cruel.'

Ada endeavoured to pacify her, but found the effort of no avail, and she was compelled to leave her on unfriendly terms.

She soon afterwards met Eveline who was coming upstairs to dress, as she intended to go to Silver Pines and inquire after Mr. Allison Mowbray, who, under Dr. Mapleson's care, was recovering with wonderful celerity.

'Will you come?' asked Eveline.

'Oh! yes; will you be long dressing, because I will go and get some breakfast, and be with you directly?'

‘Not more than half-an-hour,’ answered Eveline. ‘I wish I could dress as they say the Empress does.’

‘How is that?’ enquired Ada.

‘Of course when I say the Empress I mean Eugenie. I am told that when she leaves her bedroom for her dressing apartment, she touches an electric bell that corresponds with the room overhead, a trap-door in the ceiling opens and the toilette the Empress has signified her intention of wearing is lowered from above—petticoats, slip, dress, etc.—all ready to put on, one inside the other, with their trimmings of flowers and ribbons, flounces and lace. In a quarter of an hour she is dressed—necklace, jewels, ear-rings, are all in their places—but she has her hair done last by the *coiffeurs*, and I should get that over earlier in the affair. As for Edith, she will come round in time. If not let her sulk it out, her good or bad temper is a matter of the most perfect indifference to me.’

CHAPTER VIII.

‘THE ESCAPE.’

MR. ALLISON MOWBRAY recovered with a rapidity which showed that he was in good hands. In a few weeks he was able to get about, and felt none the worse for his accident. He and Eveline became great friends ; she felt grateful to him for his noble conduct in saving her life at the risk of his own, and he took an interest in her because it was to him that she was indebted for her existence. He knew that he had been delirious, but he was not aware that he had said anything of a compromising nature, until he heard it from Eveline, who could not keep a secret—what woman can ? The first time they were alone together she exclaimed—

‘Have you seen your friend Dagley lately, Mr. Mowbray ?’

‘Dagley,’ he repeated, trembling violently, and regarding her with astonishment mingled with consternation, ‘what do you mean ?’

‘You have a friend of that name ?’

‘I had, certainly.’

She marked the effect of her words, and she marvelled more than ever. There *was* a mystery about this man. He had done *something* ; an air of romance surrounded him.

‘Shall I tell you how I know, and what you said about him when you were ill ? Now don’t be alarmed—don’t get knocked off your centre till you have heard the indictment against you, and decided whether it is a true bill or not ; you only said you did not murder somebody, and that though Dagley might consider himself a very clever fellow he could not prove it.’

‘Was that all ?’ said Mr. Mowbray, with a laugh. ‘A man says strange things when his head goes wrong ; strange that I should have thought of my old friend Dagley, he was a Yankee trader in notions, and we have done many a deal together in the States.’

‘Then he was not a gentleman ?’

'Oh, no, a decent sort of cad enough, but that is all,' answered Allison Mowbray, who seemed desirous to change the subject and added, 'do you ride?'

'Don't I?' replied Eveline, 'just put me outside a horse and I'm at home in an instant. I can ride to hounds and go over fences that take a deal of jumping. You should see me top a fence, a six footer, or take a bullfinch, and now and then a puzzler by way of a change. Once in Leicestershire there was a regular rasper and no mistake, two ditches and all thorns. A man I knew shouted to me 'Gate to the left.' 'You may go to it if you like, I shan't,' was my reply, and away I went, got well over by luck, and a heap went down, including the M.F.H., and all the heavy brigade. Consequently I was in at the death, and heard the "whoop, whoop, tear and eat." But the days of hunting are pretty well over. The sport has been knocked on the head by your confounded high farming and your infernal wire fences. If you start me off on that subject I shall talk for an hour.'

'I was going to say that I could lend you a horse, and I can promise you he is an honest one,' said Mr. Mowbray.

'What's the advantage of the "best policy" in a horse?'

'Whenever I have ridden he always threatened to throw me, and I can safely say he kept his word.'

'That is too bad—I did not think you could be guilty of such a puerile amusement as "selling;" I thought that "sells" were confined to army men, university fellows, and schoolboys. I am shocked to think that a man of your intellect can sink so low.'

'Pardon me,' he said, laughing.

'No, I will not—not at present, at least. I must see this cattle of yours, with the sweet temper, and perhaps I shall be able to put a little reason into him.'

'Do you adopt stern measures with horses, or try kindness?'

'Whip and spur, and let them have it hot and strong up a deuce of a hill. I'll take the steam out of your horse for money, Mr. Mowbray. If the punishment does not answer I'll break his heart from sheer exhaustion.'

'You shall see him,' replied Mr. Mowbray; 'he is not much to look at—rather weedy, and long in the barrel. I don't think though he would suit you, and if we go out together I can find you one more suitable.'

'A park hack! no thank you, I know the sort of beast—warranted quiet to ride and drive, accustomed to the saddle, and thoroughly broken to harness. I've heard all that before—not for this child! I want something that will show me off to advantage, and not a slow, hippodrome sort of thing.'

They were walking from Silver Pines towards the village, and saw "the trio" standing outside a shop, where they had been buying something. Arthur Monteagle exclaimed—

'Tomkins, I'll tell you how to sell twice as much of that stuff than you do now.'

'How is that, sir?' inquired the enterprising Tomkins.

'Fill your measure,' advised Monteagle with a laugh.

The shopkeeper, who had been suspected of short weight, looked rather crestfallen, and retired into private life with as much rapidity as circumstances would permit, feeling sorry he had spoken.

As Mr. Mowbray and Eveline came up, Monteagle and Reginald Hall shook hands with them; Percy Kendal bowed coldly, and was very distant in his manner—he had not forgiven Eveline for the trick she had played Edith about the valentine, the whole story of which had been poured into his sympathising ear with many tears, and sobs, and groans.

'How do you do?' exclaimed Eveline in reply to Monteagle's salutation; 'I saw you yesterday walking with a new man I think, but you were so much occupied in listening to him that you took no notice of me.'

'Indeed, I am sorry. I apologise very much.'

'Take care it does not occur again,' replied Eveline, playfully raising her parasol with a menacing gesture.

'The man I was with must have been the little Lord Eversham.'

'He was a curds-and-whey sort of boy, with white hair and light eyes.'

'Then it was Eversham. My mother wrote to me asking me to take him under my wing, and as in duty bound I did so. He thinks he has a literary turn of mind, and is writing a novel called the "Last Man."'

'What an interesting title! Bless me, if such a thing were to happen what would become of the women!'

'The question rather is, in my opinion—what would become of the poor man!' said Arthur Monteagle.

Eveline smiled and the others laughed. Allison Mowbray was about to make some remark when his hat blew off; he was about to run after it, when Monteagle said, 'Stand still, my dear fellow, never run after your hat. You'll have half-a-dozen people after it directly.'

Sure enough, while he was speaking, six or seven boys belonging to the village started in pursuit, and one brought it back in triumph, wiping off the mud with his coat-sleeve. Mr. Mowbray received it with a look of grateful acknowledgment, and the boy retired as if he had been the recipient of a favour, and felt highly honoured.

'You fellows can walk on, I want to talk to Mr. Kendal,' exclaimed Eveline, adding, 'Mr. Kendal, come here this instant, sir. I won't have you showing temper in that way.'

He advanced to her side, unwillingly enough, and they crossed the road walking on together, and away from the others.

'Let us have it out,' continued Eveline. 'I know you have something against me, but you haven't the pluck to tell me so. I can't bear being bad friends with anybody for long. I must make it up. I am passionate, but not a bit vindictive.'

'Nor I, Miss St. Pierre,' answered Percy Kendal quietly. 'But whether you are offended or not, I must say, that when a lady forgets herself so far as you have done, she does not deserve to be treated with the same consideration as before.'

'A lady, sir, never forfeits her right to be treated as a lady, let me tell you that,' answered Eveline with spirit. 'Because I behave wrongly, have you from that fact a right and licence to conduct yourself like a blackguard, and treat me as if I had been guilty of a great crime. Don't imagine for a moment that I care two straws for your opinion, good or bad, but your education seems to be so imperfect that I take compassion upon you and try to polish you up a little. What I did was only a joke, and you must be dangerously thin-skinned if you want to make a mountain out of a mole-hill. I suppose Edith has forbidden you to speak to me?'

'She entreated me with tears in her eyes—'

'Tears,' said a cheery voice at their elbows, 'what is a tear? analyse it. It contains what? a little phosphate of lime, some chlorate of sodium and water.'

The voice belonged to Dr. Mapleson, who had overtaken the young people on his way from the house of a patient.

'Ah! my dear sir, you have no sentiment in your composition,' remarked Percy Kendal.

'Yes, I have, but it's gone under. I have not much occasion for it in my practical profession. It is a luxury which I can't afford to encourage, though it is part of my stock in trade, and I keep it on the premises ready for use should occasion call for it.'

'With you, uncle,' said Eveline, 'the falls of Niagara would only be a useless impediment in the bed of the river; when the sea is calm, you would only think of it as better for fishing. If the fields are bathed in a flood of golden sunshine, it will make the corn grow, and a rainbow would be a combination of colours curiously refracted.'

'All of which reminds me, though I don't know exactly why, that dinner ought to be ready,' said the doctor.

'More practicality. The man is incorrigible,' remarked Eveline, laughing.

Dr. Mapleson trotted on and she had an opportunity of saying to Percy Kendal, 'are we friends?' He gave an answer in the affirmative and, shaking hands, ran away to join his companions, who were on their way home and some distance down the street.

After dinner Eveline called Ada on one side and said, 'You have not forgotten the little escapade I proposed to you some time ago. I mean to do it at once. I am just in the humour for some fun of that sort. It will make such a jolly sensation, and if it is not done now it will not be done at all, as I shall have to go back to town soon.'

'Only for a few days?' said Ada.

'That is all. It will hurt nobody, and we shall get our names up as being awfully eccentric and all that.'

'I must leave word that——'

'You must do nothing of the sort,' interrupted Eveline, 'make the whole thing an impenetrable mystery. We will not go any further than Birmingham, and when we have had our fun out, we will write to the governor and let him bring us back penitent and thoroughly tame cats.'

Ada allowed herself to be prevailed upon against her better judgment. They put up a carpet bag each, had them secretly conveyed to the station by the boy who attended to the

surgery. They made him take the most fearful oaths of inviolable secrecy. How he kept them will be seen presently.

At tea that evening both the girls were missing, but their absence did not excite much attention, as every one supposed they had gone for a walk, or were over at Silver Pines.

We must follow the runaways to Birmingham before we relate what occurred at the doctor's house when the hours glided away, and their disappearance began to assume a serious aspect.

They caught a train going express to Birmingham, travelled first class, and arrived there about nine o'clock at night. Getting into a cab with their slender stock of luggage, Eveline told the man to drive to a decent hotel in the neighbourhood, and he took them to one named the 'Haycock,' which was a tolerable house, though not of the first class. The commercial element was represented there more than the aristocratic. They ordered some supper and wine, took a handsome suite of apartments, the best they had to give them, and went to bed in the same apartment which was double-bedded, not liking to separate in a strange place. They got up late in the morning and ordered breakfast, asking the waiter if they could have a pony-carriage to drive into the country. The man replied in the affirmative, and said he would order one for them and it should be at the door at eleven punctually.

'I mean to enjoy myself, dear,' said Eveline; 'and we will take ourselves about pretty well while this delicious freedom lasts, which a presentiment I have tells me will not be long.'

Ada fervently hoped it would not; she was alarmed for her friend's sake, but she did not say so, because she was afraid of Eveline's St. Pierre's ridicule.

As they were going to the carriage, a gentleman in the hall accidentally trod on Eveline's dress and tore it from the gathers.

'It is very odd that such clumsy wretches are allowed to run about loose in such a reckless way,' Eveline remarked to Ada, as she stopped to gather up her skirt, she having put on a long dress for driving.

The gentleman overheard this remark, and immediately exclaimed—

'I really beg you ten thousand pardons for my awkwardness; what can I do to remedy the evil?'

'Get me a few pins, if you please, there is not much damage done; send the chambermaid.'

‘I fancy we shall be able to dispense with the assistance of that ornament to her sex, as I have a few of the articles you stand in need of about me,’ said the stranger.

He drew a little pincushion as he spoke from his pocket. It was in the shape of a horse shoe and studded with pins.

Eveline took it, observing with her unabashed impudence—

‘I presume you are a traveller in the pin trade. Everybody sells or buys here I believe.’

The stranger smiled, and stroked a glossy black moustache. He was a little man, carefully dressed, and had the appearance of being a gentleman; he smiled again, and Eveline having arranged her dress to her satisfaction handed him back his cushion with thanks, looking him up and down as she did so, rather rudely taking stock of him.

‘May I venture to inquire if the inspection is satisfactory?’ he inquired.

‘Yes, you may be tolerated in the absence of anything better,’ answered Eveline.

‘In that case, will you allow me to give you my card, as we are staying in the same hotel. I shall be most happy to be of any service to you, should it be in my power.’

Eveline took the card and glanced carelessly at it, but her attention was riveted on seeing the name, which was Mr. Charles Danvers Dagley.

‘Mowbray’s Dagley!’ she exclaimed involuntarily.

‘Excuse me,’ he said, also exhibiting great interest, ‘did you say Mowbray?’

‘Yes, Allison Mowbray is a personal friend of my own. Do you know him?’

‘I did know him, but it would be strange if I did now as he is dead, I am sorry to say,’ answered Mr. Danvers Dagley.

‘This meeting is very remarkable,’ said Eveline; ‘we must have a little conversation together on the subject. You say you knew a Mr. Allison Mowbray. I say that I know one now, and my Mowbray speaks of a Dagley which you must allow is odd. We will see if we cannot explain this farce of the two Mowbrays. What are you going to do this evening?’

‘I am disengaged.’

‘Will you honour me with your company to dinner at six o’clock? My friend and I are going out for a drive now.’

‘I accept your invitation gladly, and will come without fail,’ returned Mr. Charles Danvers Dagley.

‘Till then, good-bye.’

Eveline descended the steps of the hotel with Ada. Mr. Danvers Dagley assisted them into the carriage, and lifted his hat politely as they started off at a rattling pace up the street, Eveline handling her pair of ponies in a masterly style, which showed her to be an accomplished whip.

‘Here is an adventure at once. Is it not charming?’ exclaimed Eveline, in ecstasies. ‘We have started a hare without any trouble. What fun if he should really turn out to be Mr. Allison Mowbray’s Dagley, we shall find out all about the hidden crime. I am so glad we came.’

‘Where are you going, dear?’ asked Ada.

‘I have not the remotest idea in the world, Aston Hall way, I suppose. We shall get out of the town if we go far enough, and then all we have to do is to follow our noses.’

‘I don’t care,’ replied Ada. ‘I have arrived at that happy state of *insouciance* that it is a matter of the most supreme indifference to me where I go. If I were to find myself in the moon, it would not surprise me in the least.’

‘Away we go, then, and *vive la bagatelle!*’ cried Eveline, touching her ponies smartly with the whip, and passing an omnibus so closely that it was a miracle the wheels did not come in collision.

Away they went, as madcap, harum-scarum a couple of thoughtless girls as could be found anywhere out of a lunatic asylum.

Assuredly the man who said that girls at some periods of their lives are not responsible for their actions was not far wrong.

CHAPTER IX.

'THE PURSUIT.'

WHEN supper time came and there was no sign of the girls, the consternation which reigned in the doctor's house later in the evening with full force began to manifest itself. Messengers were dispatched to Mr. Lacy's, to Silver Pines, and even to Underwood's, to ask if Arthur Monteagle or any one else had seen anything of them. When these messengers arrived without bringing any intelligence, blank dismay was visible on every countenance. Mr. Mapleson was at home, and he felt it quite a relief when Mr. Allison Mowbray himself came up to make inquiries after the missing ones. Neither Mrs. Mapleson nor Edith could give any information. Ada and Eveline had been seen to go out together after dinner by themselves, but that was nothing new, and excited no curiosity, as Eveline and Ada were inseparable companions, and always went out together, at least once a day.

'Where can they have gone?' said Mrs. Mapleson, who was lost in a maze of perplexity.

'I cannot imagine,' answered the doctor; 'this is most embarrassing. I know not what to think. Perhaps this is some prank of Eveline's. I never saw such a wild girl in all my life. If she and Ada were not so given to flightiness I should be more alarmed than I am. Has anybody examined their bed-room?'

Nobody had. As this was considered a brilliant idea, both Mrs. Mapleson and Edith rushed off to make the examination at once. With a woman's prying eyes, Mrs. Mapleson soon made the astounding discovery that the carpet bags were missing, sundry articles of clothing, and all the accessories of the toilette, such as scents, brushes, combs, pomades, *et id genus omne*. When they came down with this news Mr. Allison Mowbray's face brightened, as did the doctor's.

'Come,' said the former, 'we are getting near the truth now. The affair is beginning to assume the aspect of an elopement.'

'If so, somebody about the premises must know something. Have the servants up, my dear,' said the doctor.

The bell was rung, and the servants ordered to come up. When it was known that they were all to be 'carpeted' great speculation was rife in the hall, but only one guilty soul trembled, and that was the property of Fuggles, the medicine boy. Fuggles shook in his shoes. It is no exaggeration to say that Fuggles broke out all over into a cold sweat, and beads of perspiration gathered on his forehead.* Jane the housemaid noticed his signs of trepidation, and said—

'Fuggles, you're in this!'

'No, I ain't,' he answered, with a snuffling whine. But this faint denial did not convince the astute Jane.

When Sarah the cook, and Jane the housemaid, and John the coachman, and Fuggles the odd boy had toe'd a line, Jane exclaimed—

'Hif you'll hexcuse me, sir, I think I can p'int to the guilty party, leastways one who knows more about the dis-happearence of the young ladies than he choses to say.'

'Who's that, Jane?' asked the doctor.

'That's Fuggles, sir.'

'Now then, Fuggles, speak up like a man, sir. No prevarication, no beating about the bush with me, sir,' said Dr. Mapleson, in a threatening tone.

If Fuggles had been tampering with the drugs in the surgery, and putting prussic acid in the servant's supper beer, he could not have cowered more abjectly beneath the withering glances with which he was favoured. It was a foregone conclusion in every mind that Fuggles was the culprit. They could not have glared at him more terribly if he had been a criminal of the deepest dye.

Mindful of his awful oaths, and having before his mind's eye the dreadful fate of Ananias and the equally mendacious Sapphira, Fuggles trembled.

'Now, sir,' continued the doctor, 'let me hear your voice. This silence is very much against you.'

'I ain't got nothing to say, sir,' replied Fuggles in a sepulchral voice.

'That delightful accumulation of negatives would lead me to suppose the contrary,' answered the doctor; adding more sternly, as he dropped his playfulness, 'now, sir, I insist upon a reply from you. What do you know about this mysterious

affair? This is a specific question, let me have a distinct answer.'

'Why I see him with two carpet bags, one in each hand, this very afternoon. I wish I may never speak no more, sir, if I did not,' said the cook.

'It's a ——,' began Fuggles, when the doctor cut him short in a thundering voice, saying, 'Boy, beware! If you dare to tell me any lies, I'll take a dog whip and thrash you within an inch of your life. Make a clean breast of it, sir. Where did you take those carpet bags?'

'If you 'it me,' said Fuggles backing into a corner, 'I'll bite and kick, and my mother 'll have the law of you.'

'Don't threaten me with your mother, boy,' cried the doctor, who was rapidly losing his temper, 'what did you do with those carpet bags.'

'I took a hoath,' said Fuggles.

'You took a what, sir?' queried the doctor who was getting rather fogged.

'A hoath,' answered Fuggles. 'They made me swear on my bended knees as I'd not reveal to a morshall soul what I'd been and done.'

'It's your duty, sir, to tell me. Boy! do you hear, it is your duty to tell me, the father of one of those misguided girls, what you did with those carpet bags.'

'No,' said Fuggles, resolutely, 'you don't bounce me. I've took a hoath, and I ain't said my catekism and two prayers of a night and morning for nothing. If you was to whip me ever so I would not tell. If you was to beat me till to-morrow morning and I was black and blue all over, you wouldn't get no more than an 'owl or two out of me. I might 'owl a good'un, I don't say as I should'nt 'owl a bit, but I wouldn't break my hoath if every bone in my body was broke in two.'

Fuggles burst into tears at the terrible prospect his vivid imagination had conjured up, and the doctor, going closer to him, said, 'Misguided boy, it is quite permissible for you to break any promise you have made, because any information which you can give me will conduce to the young ladies' good. Don't you see, Fuggles?'

Fuggles did not see. Fuggles was the densest boy that ever existed. All he could understand was, that he had to keep his oath, and the doctor's persuasive eloquence was utterly wasted upon him. He was impervious to it, and would have remained so had Demosthenes harangued him.

At this juncture Ernest Lacy entered the room. The state of affairs was explained to him, and he promptly exclaimed, 'I think I can throw some light upon the subject which seems to perplex you all. This afternoon I was near the station, when I saw your boy take two carpet bags into the waiting room.

Fuggles looked at him gratefully. The cat was out of the bag, and Fuggles would be tortured no longer; his conscience was clear, he had not let the feline creature out.

'I will go to the station at once,' exclaimed Dr. Mapleson; 'the station master is a friend of mine, and I am sure will gladly give me any information he can.'

The servants were dismissed and Fuggles was comparatively happy. He had the sweet consciousness of having offered to undergo martyrdom for the truth's sake, and it became a saying in Lowersham afterwards, 'You may kill Fuggles, but he won't break his oath.'

The doctor put on his hat and coat and started. Ernest Lacy and the others remained in conversation, wasting the time in vain conjectures. Ernest was particularly anxious about Ada. It is true they had had a serious quarrel which had not yet been made up, but he lived in the hope of a reconciliation, and did not consider the wayward girl wholly lost to him.

In half an hour the doctor came back radiant.

'It's all right,' he said. 'Tibs, the station master, has told me that Ada and Eveline took two first class tickets to Birmingham. So we shall find them amongst the Brums. Though what could have induced them to take such an extraordinary step, I am still at a loss to imagine.'

'The love of adventure,' suggested Mr. Mowbray.

'Possibly. I am glad I know where they are gone though,' replied the doctor, 'it saves one a world of nervous anxiety. I should have had the river dragged and rewards offered.'

'Somebody must start for Birmingham to-morrow,' said Mrs. Mapleson.

'Decidedly,' returned her husband. 'I suppose I must employ the police. You see, my dear, I am tied by the leg. I can't possibly get away or my practice will go to the devil.'

'If I may be permitted,' said Mr. Allison Mowbray, 'I will offer to go on this expedition.'

'And nothing would give me greater pleasure than to accompany Mr. Mowbray,' said Ernest Lacy.

'I accept the services of both of you with unfeigned delight,' answered Dr. Mapleson; 'you shall both go off by the first train, and I will be answerable for all the expenses.'

'No, no. That shall be my care, I will arrange all about the expenses, or I will not undertake the affair. You must let me do it in my own way, my dear sir.'

'Very well. The rising generation are so headstrong,' replied Dr. Mapleson.

The remainder of the evening was spent in arranging a plan of the coming campaign. Ernest Lacy looked over a timetable. There was a train at nine in the morning, and he made an appointment with Mr. Mowbray at the station for that hour.

Every one retired to rest that night with their anxiety considerably lessened, though none were really at their ease.

'That girl Eveline is, I think, possessed,' said Mrs. Mapleson to her husband when she was undressing.

The doctor smiled at this candid expression of opinion.

'I'll pack her off home,' he replied, 'when we get her back.'

'Oh! pray do. The responsibility is too great. I have not known a quiet hour since in the house she's been.'

'I'll do it, my dear. Leave her to me.'

With this promise Mrs. Mapleson was satisfied.

When Mr. Allison Mowbray and Ernest Lacy met at the station, the train was just coming in. They took their tickets, secured places, and started.

'This is lively,' said Mr. Mowbray after their greeting was over.

'Yes,' replied Ernest. 'There is no saying what girls will do when they get mad fits into their heads. I certainly did think Ada had more sense. But as for Miss St. Pierre, nothing she did would surprise me in the least.'

'I like a girl of spirit, though,' remarked Mr. Mowbray, 'and I daresay she will make a good wife when she settles down.'

'When she does,' said Ernest with a laugh.

'You seem rather incredulous as to that highly desirable event.'

'I own it.'

'Eveline calls herself a Girl of the Period. She belongs to a new class of girls which has sprung up lately. She is the result, and those like her, of laxity of morals prevailing everywhere; ritualism, which encourages a luxurious taste and

supports confession; an ever increasing expensive taste in dress; the influence of men, who are more abandoned than ever; and the curse of the present age—that everlasting desire to go ahead, which is fostered by vast wealth, easily accumulated in many ways; increased facility of communication by means of railways and the telegraph; and a rising wish amongst women to assert their independence and place themselves on a level with men. They are candidates for the suffrage, they ride, drive, smoke, talk, I was going to say drink, like men. The upshot of all these secret motive powers and this *melange* is a Girl of the Period. I for one must admit I don't dislike the result.'

'It is not much to my taste,' answered Ernest Lacy, 'and yet we are indirectly responsible for it. Do we not encourage it?'

'We tolerate it?'

'I assert again, you encourage it. We all do. A steady quiet girl, brought up in the old school, who would faint at the idea of being kissed in the dark, gets neglected in a drawing-room for one of the showy, dressy, chatty, slangy, go-ahead Girls of the Period. The latter would have been impossible twenty years ago. Now they are a great fact. We may be Frankensteins, but we must put up with our own creation.'

'I quite agree with you, sir,' exclaimed a voice in an opposite corner of the carriage.

Allison Mowbray looked up and beheld a tall, gentlemanly-looking man, who had a railway rug over his knees, and had been reading a book. Considering his interference impertinent, Mowbray replied with some *hauteur*—

'I daresay you do, sir; but as I did not ask you for your opinion, it is a matter of indifference to me what you think.'

'Oh! very well, sir, very well. You must blame my Continental experience if you find fault with me for intruding upon your privacy,' answered the stranger.

'Hang your Continental experience,' said Mowbray, becoming more irate.

'By all means. That is what I have said a dozen times. It cost me a pot of money, and I never could find out that it was worth it,' rejoined the stranger, with the utmost coolness, adding, 'My name's Cheek, John Cheek, of Birmingham, and——'

'A very good name too, sir; for you I mean,' said Allison Mowbray.

'There I am bound to differ with you. I am too retiring and modest to bear a name with the interpretation you put upon it. But I was about to observe that I do not wish to force myself upon any one's society. That's not me, oh, dear no, quite different. I seldom make new acquaintances, but I could not help endorsing your opinions respecting the Girls of the Period. They are not half such a bad lot as they are made out. I've got two of my own. They can dress too. Regular screamers, I call them. You should see them out on a Sunday. They'd make your hair curl. Such dresses and petticoats! They're all there; up to the nines and no mistake, sir.'

'It must be very gratifying to them to know that they have the sanction of so discerning a parent for the eccentric course which they chose to adopt,' observed Mr. Mowbray.

'Yes, they stick to their dad, though they do kick over the traces a bit, now and then. They won't run in a snaffle. It's not their form. They're like race horses compared to carters, when you put them beside the ordinary run of girls. But you shall come and see them. If you don't say they're out and out clippers, I'll stand any drinks you like to put a name to.'

'I never drink with people I don't know.'

'And very right too,' answered the imperturbable Mr. Cheek. 'I got sucked in awful through doing that same once. "Never no more, John," says I to myself. But your remark does not apply to me. We've knocked up an acquaintance wonderful easy, and you shall see my gals. I promise you that.'

It was impossible to shake Mr. Cheek off, and both Allison Mowbray and Ernest Lacy were compelled to listen to his vulgar conversation, which they found amusing if not interesting.

Having gone to bed late and risen early, they began to feel drowsy, and went to sleep after a time. While asleep, they both fancied they felt Mr. Cheek bending over them, but concluding it was a dream, they dozed off again.

When they awoke they found they had the carriage to themselves. Mr. John Cheek had got out at some small station at which they had stopped while asleep.

'What's the time?' said Allison Mowbray with a yawn,

feeling for his watch. 'By Jove,' he added suddenly, 'it's gone.'

'And mine,' cried Ernest Lacy, at the same moment. 'Eh! what's this? my purse too! Devil take it! I've been cleaned out. Robbed, sir, robbed for money, and by that fellow, Cheek.'

They stared blankly at one another.

CHAPTER X.

‘WITHOUT A PENNY.’

THE travellers continued to search their pockets, while the expression of amazement which had taken possession of their faces increased. Their money and valuables had been extracted during their slumber by a practised hand. Mr. John Cheek, of Birmingham, was no common thief. Nothing but their railway tickets remained to them. They had lost several pounds, but serious as the loss was just then, they could not help laughing at the absurd position in which they were placed.

‘I never heard of such a thing in the whole course of my life,’ said Ernest Lacy, still fumbling about his pockets in the vain hope of finding something.

‘We’ve been had like lambs,’ replied Allison Mowbray; ‘the clever scoundrel has cleaned me out and not left me a rap.’

‘And me too. I haven’t even got twopence for a glass of beer.’

‘I thought,’ said Mr. Mowbray, ‘that I had arrived at a time of life when my knowledge of the world would prevent anything of this sort occurring, but Mr. John Cheek talked about his daughters until he sent me off to sleep, and then he worked his wicked will upon my pockets.’

‘What are we to do when we get to Birmingham?’ asked Ernest.

‘The wind is tempered to the shorn sheep, and there was a prophet who was fed by ravens,’ suggested Mr. Mowbray.

‘Birds of the air will not feed us.’

‘That is an assertion which at present requires proof, and let me tell you, my young and intelligent friend, that you ought to be grateful for any crumbs of comfort in a dilemma like the present.’

‘In order to lighten my spirits, the crumbs should be those of aerated bread,’ answered Ernest, with a laugh.

‘I am more grieved than angry after all,’ exclaimed Allison

Mowbray. 'This sort of thing gives a rude shock to one's faith in human nature. Here was I beginning to take quite a fancy to John Cheek, when that infernal sleep came over me. I believe he had put opium in the cigar he was smoking, or some drug which affected my senses. I could have taken Cheek to my heart and made a friend of him.'

'I have heard that friendship between two women is always a plot against a third, and when existing between two men, it is a continual struggle as to which of the two shall do the other.'

'I have been done by Cheek. I admit it most candidly. I was never so sold in my life. It is delicious when one comes to think of it.'

'I can't see anything at all delicious about it. I don't like this Robinson Crusoe sort of way of being turned up in a strange place without any coin,' replied Ernest Lacy, with a lugubrious countenance.

'We must live on our wits.'

'I wish I had a glass of wine to sharpen my wits,' said Ernest; 'at home, when I want to stimulate my wit, I always resort to wine.'

'In this instance you will have to resort to your wits to get your wine I am afraid,' replied Mr. Mowbray.

'Do you think we shall be able to get our money back if we complain to the railway authorities, describe the thief, and get them to telegraph to the different stations on the line.'

'Not the shadow of a chance. The man has assumed some disguise by this time which would render any description we could give of him utterly useless,' answered Mr. Mowbray. 'No, my dear boy, we've been diddled and we must grin and bear it. The less we say about it the better, unless we want to be laughed at. I used to say that the farther west I went I could the more easily understand the reason why the wise men came from the east, but now I must hide my diminished head.'

'But what about ready money?'

'Trust to the fortune of war.'

'Who's he?' asked Ernest Lacy, smiling; adding, 'I cannot dig, to beg I am ashamed, and to imitate the example of the immortal Cheek might result in danger to an unpractised hand.'

'When we get to the capital of shams, I will telegraph to

Lowersham for a supply of cash. Until then we must do the best we can. Pawn our great coats or something.'

'Pawn! What a dreadful idea,' said Ernest Lacy.

'Not a bit of it,' said Mr. Mowbray; 'when I was your age I have been so hard up, that my only misery was, not going to the spout shop, as we called it, but having nothing to take there.'

'You! have you been in want of money, Mr. Mowbray?' asked Ernest in astonishment.

'Yes. So much so, that I have slept in the street for a week together and haven't known where or how to get a dinner for more than a month. I have envied a beggar who has anticipated me in picking up a piece of garbage from the gutter. But it is all over now and we won't talk about it.'

'Yet you are a man of birth and education.'

'Of what use is education to you? The privations I am talking about took place in New York. Education won't get you a loaf of bread in the new world and does not do much for you in the old. Far better know a trade, far better understand how to cobble up a boot, than be senior wrangler or first in the classical trips at Oxford.'

The train stopped and the porters called out the name of the station, which was Birmingham. Our travellers alighted and took their bags in their hands.

'Better leave these,' suggested Ernest, adding, 'here porter, cloak room! we want to leave these carpet bags till we find a hotel.'

'Cert'nly, sir,' replied the porter, 'this way cloak room, sir.'

'You've done a nice thing,' whispered Mr. Mowbray; 'you've put your foot in it. They charge twopence apiece for parcels, and where is the money to come from?'

'By jove! I never thought of that,' replied Ernest in the same tone; 'what is to be done?'

'Leave it to me. Porter! just take these bags, as we're in a hurry. Leave them at the office and keep the tickets yourself till we come. We will give you whatever you pay and something for your trouble. Do you understand? We shall know you again. Your number I see is 4.'

The porter made no objection and this difficulty was bridged over, much to Ernest's satisfaction, who began to think he had got into a hobble, from which extrication would be difficult.

They got out of the station and walked arm-in-arm along

the street, Ernest saying, 'Now, for the needle in a bundle of hay.'

'I think we shall hear some news of the fugitives by applying at the police station. We want to give notice of our robbery in the railway carriage, and we can kill two birds with one stone.'

Ernest thought he knew the nearest way to the police station, but Mr. Mowbray insisted that he was wrong. "How many times have you been to Birmingham?" said Ernest.

'Only once before.'

'And I have been three times, therefore I must know better than you.'

'Not at all; probably your stay in the whole of the three times did not extend over a week, while I was twelve months here,' answered Mr. Mowbray.

Ernest gave in, this argument was too cogent to be refuted. They had not gone far before they came to the Haycock, at which hostelry it will be remembered the fair fugitives had taken refuge. It was now mid-day and both the men felt hungry.

'Methinks I could take mine ease at mine inn,' observed Ernest Lacy with a longing sigh.

A most appetising smell came up in clouds of steam from the kitchen windows which were open. Mr. Mowbray looked down and saw a fine goose just ready to be taken up. The cook was finishing it up with assiduous basting.

'Curious person that cook,' said Mr. Mowbray. 'He's standing near grease and yet he's close to spithead. See the joke. Never mind, forgive me this time and I won't do it again. Will you stay here or walk up and down for half an hour? I am going in here to have some dinner. I must have some of that goose. I never felt so mad about anything in my life. I shall die if I don't have some of that goose.'

'But you've no money.'

'That does not matter. I have an idea instead, and I'll back ideas against money any day in the week.'

'Can't I come with you?' said Ernest, upon whom the savour of the roast goose acted very much as it did upon his companion.

'No, two will spoil my plan. I will tell you how I get on and you can try your luck afterwards.'

'Very well,' Ernest replied, 'I'll walk up and down. Don't be longer than you can help.'

Allison Mowbray nodded affirmatively, and walked up the stone steps leading to the hotel. In the passage he met a little dapper man who made him a low bow, and said, 'Want to stay, sir—apartments, sir, or merely dinner, sir.'

'Where is the landlord?' asked Mr. Mowbray.

'I am the landlord, sir, Robert Scrubbs, duly licensed.'

'Ah! Very well. Now, Mr. Scrubbs, I have just arrived in the town and am rather hungry. What can you give me to eat. What can you give me?'

'Nice roast goose, sir, capital cut, just coming up; apple sauce, potatoes, cauliflower, pint of nice dry sherry. Can give you that, sir.'

'That will do. Give it me at once.'

The landlord bowed, and showed his customer into the dining room, which was empty. It being scarcely the dinner hour yet with those who frequented the Haycock, Mr. Mowbray had not long to wait. The goose was brought to him steaming hot; he eat heartily, drank the pint of sherry, and felt like a giant refreshed after this plentiful meal. Now came the *mauvaise quart d'heure* of Rabelais, in which the reckoning has to be settled. Rising and arranging his coat with characteristic nonchalance, he walked to the door. The waiter followed him, and fearing that his memory was treacherous, ventured to exclaim, 'Beg pardon, sir, but the bill you haven't settled. Roast goose, 'taters, and greens, half-a-crown, pint dry sherry, four shillings. No bread I think, sir. Six and six exact, sir.'

'Nonsense, my good fellow, send the landlord here,' replied Mr. Mowbray.

The waiter only went as far as the door, as if fearful of letting his customer out of sight; he was apprehensive of his being a queer customer. The landlord was in the bar and he called him out.

'What is it, sir. Hope the dinner was to your liking?' said the landlord, looking curiously at Mr. Mowbray, who replied, 'Very much so indeed. Nothing could be better. But your waiter has had the impertinence to ask me to pay for it. Did you ever hear such a thing? Ha! ha!'

'Ha! ha!' laughed Mr. Scrubbs, but very faintly. When a customer laughed he could not be so rude as to refuse to join in the merriment, though on this occasion he was afraid the laugh was going against himself.

'Now I ask you, I put it to you Scrubbs,' continued Mr. Mowbray, assuming a familiar tone, 'did I order anything in your house? I came in and told you I was hungry. "What will you *give* me?" I said, and you very generously offered to give me some roast goose and a pint of dry sherry. It was very good of you. You were kind and I am grateful. But I certainly shan't think of paying for your gift. I would not insult you by offering to do such a thing.'

Mr. Scrubbs grinned a ghastly grin. He saw he had been 'done.' It was the first time, and he swore by his beard it should be the last.

'Thank you,' he said. 'They get up early where you come from, don't they? You have taught me something, and it is cheap at the price. I'm much obliged to you. Let the gentleman pass, James. It's all right. The bill's squared. I'll let him go and chance it.'

'Bye, bye, Scrubbs,' exclaimed Allison Mowbray, waving his hand playfully. 'Capital dry sherry that of yours. First class goose; cooked to a turn. Ta, ta, see you again soon.'

'If you come the old soldier over me again I'll forgive you, my gentleman,' muttered Mr. Scrubbs, who was in a terrible passion. The trick was so neat, and had been so well done, that he did not think it worth while to make a disturbance about a few shillings. The joke, too, was so good, and he would be unmercifully chaffed by his friends if it got about. Every man who came into his house would ask him to 'give' him something; so he made a virtue of necessity and put up with his loss.

When Allison Mowbray got outside the hotel, he was instantly joined by Ernest Lacy, who was getting ravenously hungry.

'Well!' he exclaimed, 'how did you get on? I am famishing.'

Mr. Mowbray took a scented handkerchief from his pocket, and deliberately wiped his mouth.

'Excellent dinner! Splendid goose; done to perfection! and,' he added, with a laugh at his own joke, 'so was the landlord. Dry sherry of the first vintage, and nothing to pay.'

'How did you manage it?' asked Ernest in perplexity.

'I went in, and inquired what the landlord would give me for dinner. He could not ask for payment for a gift, so you see I had him that way.'

‘Wait for me, I’ll go and do the same,’ cried Ernest, going at once up the steps.

He encountered the landlord in the passage near the bar, at which a gentleman, who was taking some sherry and bitters, was standing.

‘Are you the landlord?’ said Ernest, and receiving an affirmative reply, went on, ‘What will you give me for dinner?’

‘Oh! here’s another of them. No, he doesn’t. Not for Joe. It isn’t good enough by a long way. It’s time to turn up the giving game, I think,’ said Mr. Scrubbs to himself; exclaiming aloud, ‘Wait a minute, sir, just one minute, I’ll go and see.’

He disappeared round a corner, but was not long gone. When he returned he had a basin of filthy water in his hand, which he threw over Ernest, completely smothering him with the malodorous liquid. Then he proceeded to kick him along the passage and down the steps, crying loudly—

‘That’s what I’ll give you, my fine fellow, that’s what I’ll give you, and that, and that, and that.’

Each ‘that’ meant a vigorous application of his boot to the rearmost part of his would-be customer’s person, and in less time than it takes to write it, Ernest found himself standing in the street, very sore, burning with rage, conscious of not smelling sweet, and trying to get the dirty water out of his eyes, nose, and ears.

It was with difficulty that Allison Mowbray could restrain his laughter, for he had rather expected this ludicrous result. The regard he had for his travelling companion was not very great, and he felt little concern when he saw the plight he was in. He thought it would do him good, and knock a little of the nonsense out of him.

When Ernest Lacy got his eyes open, he said indignantly, ‘Look here! I don’t take it at all kindly that you should have subjected me to this sort of treatment.’

‘I thought I had put you in for a good thing,’ replied Mr. Mowbray.

‘A good thing! why I’m swamped, and could believe that I had just come out of a cesspool.’

‘You are rather nasty I must admit,’ rejoined Allison Mowbray, moving a little on one side so that he might not come between the wind and his nobility.

The person who had been drinking the sherry and bitters

at the bar came down the steps, and, nodding to Ernest, said—

‘Excuse the liberty I am taking. I witnessed the assault upon you just now, which was committed by Mr. Robert Scrubbs of the Haycock Hotel. It was altogether unjustifiable. You had done nothing to provoke it, nothing whatever; and if people will allow their temper to get the better of their judgment, they must suffer for it. In a word, they must pay for it, sir.’

‘What do you mean, sir?’ inquired Ernest, wiping himself down with a handkerchief.

‘You must have damages, sir, from this man. It is not to be borne that you should be treated in this disgraceful manner. It makes the blood of a free-born Briton boil.’

‘I wish you would not work me up,’ said Ernest Lacy, who felt rather small at not having resented the indignities to which he had been subjected. ‘If you work me up, I shall go in and punch his head.’

‘Don’t do that. Utter madness, my dear sir,’ the stranger hastened to say. ‘I am sorry I introduced the free-born Briton. Worms will turn; I know they will. Not that I mean to say you are a worm, far from it; but the mischief is there is not one worm in a hundred who knows how to turn. You should place your little affair in the hands of a respectable solicitor, sir. That’s the way to turn.’

‘Where am I to find one, and what good shall I do by it?’

‘Here, sir, here at your elbow and by your side. I am a solicitor, and I may say, without boasting, a respectable one. Give me the conduct of the affair. I will, if you prefer it, proceed by writ in the usual way in one of the superior courts; or, if I have my own way, I will go in to Mr. Scrubbs and settle the matter off hand by way of compromise; say ten pounds for you and five for my trouble, fifteen in all. Will ~~ten~~ be a sufficient *solatium* for you, my dear sir?’

‘A good idea,’ cried Allison Mowbray. ‘We shall make something out of this. Accept the offer, Lacy. Let Mr. —’

‘Jones, sir. Thurlow Addison Jones.’

‘Let Mr. Jones square the matter in the way he suggests.’

Ernest made no opposition, and Mr. Thurlow Addison Jones went into the hotel, leaving his client outside. He was absent half-an-hour. At the expiration of that time he returned, saying—

‘The defendant at the suit of—your name, sir? Lacy, thank you. The defendant wishes for a written undertaking that on the payment of fifteen pounds all further proceedings will be stayed. I think we may give him that indemnity.’

‘Certainly.’

‘Follow me then, if you please.’

Ernest Lacy and Mr. Jones went into the hotel, leaving Mr. Mowbray outside. The landlord had been so convinced by the eloquence of Mr. Thurlow Addison Jones that he had not a leg to stand upon, from a legal point of view, that he was only too glad to come to terms. With a heavy sigh and a sad heart he opened his cash-box, and on receiving the written guarantee paid over fifteen sovereigns, with which Ernest took his departure, handing Mr. Jones his five in the passage.

They walked after Mowbray, who had gone a little way up the street, and the three had a short conversation together. That they had got some money was a source of unqualified congratulation to the travellers. Mr. Jones seemed aware of this, for he said—

‘Just came in handy, didn’t it? I suppose you will stand a dinner out of the proceeds. I cut it rather too fine in arranging for my share, or I would order the banquet.’

‘My good sir,’ said Ernest Lacy, who was hungry and wet enough to be in a bad temper, ‘I have employed you and paid you for your services. There is an end of the connection between us. I have the honour to wish you good morning.’

‘That’s wrong,’ observed Mr. Jones. ‘Never kick down the ladder by which you have risen; you may want it again. However, there is one comfort. I can afford to stand Sam myself. So good morning, gentlemen.’

Mr. Jones bowed and walked rapidly away, not at all displeased with his morning’s work. Whether he was an attorney or not the friends had no opportunity of judging. Probably he was but an adventurous fellow, whose only stock-in-trade was his impudence. One fact was undeniable, he had put some money in their pockets at a time when they most wanted it.

‘It’s my turn to dine now,’ exclaimed Ernest Lacy, ‘and we need not worry ourselves about the expenses. I’ll pay for some champagne if you like to have it.’

‘I’m your man,’ replied Allison Mowbray. ‘Stop a bit, let us get into this doorway. I want to see who these girls

are coming along in that clothes-basket thing of a carriage. One is awfully like Eveline St. Pierre !'

'And the other,' said Ernest Lacy, 'yes, the other is Ada Mapleson, or I'll eat my hat. We've spotted the runaways, I'll bet a Robertus. We've spotted them for a bob.'

And in his excitement Ernest Lacy became positively slangy. His friend dragged him into the shadow of a doorway, saying—

'They intend to pull up. The ponies are going more slowly. Perhaps they have pitched at the "Haycock." I do not wish them to see us yet. We must play cat and mouse with them, and have some fun.'

'I'm game!' answered Ernest. 'What a joke to think we have found them so easily !'

'Rather odd, but I'm very glad. If we find that they are stopping at the hotel, we will telegraph to Lowersham, and let the old folks know.'

'Yes, we must do that.'

In a couple of minutes the trap stopped at the door of the "Haycock." The girls alighted and entered the hotel. The landlord did not appear. The loss of his fifteen pounds was preying upon his mind.

'Marked down, as safe as houses,' cried Allison Mowbray, joyfully. 'Old Scrubbs does not show. He finds parting anything but a sweet sorrow, and he would have preferred to avoid relieving our pressing necessities.'

'I hope the loss of his fifteen quid will not be the death of him,' observed Ernest.

Decidedly, for a parson's son, Ernest was getting slangy.

CHAPTER XI.

'A DINNER FOR THREE AND UNINVITED GUESTS.'

It may be readily imagined that Mr. Charles Danvers Dagley did not forget the invitation which the girls had given him. They did not stop to think of the impropriety of asking a totally strange man to dine with them. Eveline St. Pierre seldom thought about proprieties, and when she did it was to laugh at conventional rules. 'I don't mean any harm,' she would say. In this instance her curiosity to know something about Mr. Allison Mowbray prevented her from being in the slightest degree scrupulous.

She had ordered the best dinner the hotel could produce, and James, the waiter, had taken pains with the table, which presented a very showy appearance. At the time appointed Mr. Dagley sent up his card and was admitted. The ladies received him cordially, and were in evening dress, having made such purchases during the day as the scantiness of the wardrobe they had brought with them rendered necessary.

'How kind of you to take compassion upon us poor unprotected females!' said Eveline. 'We have come over for a few days to Birmingham, where we know positively no one, and are quite alone. As we are both acquainted with Mr. Mowbray, of course it is a sufficient introduction. I may tell you that my Mowbray lives at Silver Pines, near Loversham, in Derbyshire.'

'My poor friend was looking forward to an inheritance in that locality, and I have heard him talk of Silver Pines,' answered Mr. Dagley. 'But, unhappily, he was shot through the heart in a free fight at Buffalo, more than a year and a half ago. Perhaps some other Mowbray has succeeded to the property. It is odd, though, that he should be named Allison.'

'Is it not still more odd that my Mowbray should talk of his friend Dagley? But here is dinner. We must resume this conversation at another time.'

James placed the soup upon the table, and Eveline allowed

Mr. Dagley to do the honours. They made a very agreeable little party. The wine was excellent; but Eveline refused any sherry.

'Bring me some bitter in a tankard,' she said. 'I can't stand this cold drawn castor oil sort of stuff, though I'll have a glass or two of fiz presently.'

Mr. Charles Danvers Dagley inquired how they enjoyed their drive. They replied, very much. He explained that he had made an excursion, having pilgrimaged it to Shakespeare's house at Stratford. 'You are an admirer of the bard of Avon, I presume,' he added.

'I beg your pardon,' said Eveline, as if she did not understand him.

'Bard of Avon, Shakespeare, you know,' he explained.

'Ah! excuse my density. I am not well up in poetical slang. I am unfortunately very stupid; don't go in for the Pierian spring, and all that sort of thing. I know who you mean; wrote plays and stole deer, didn't he?'

'You have seen some of his plays acted, I suppose, or read them?'

'I have a vague idea of a few. Does not Othello show the folly of leaving one's handkerchief about, and Romeo and Juliet warn one of the danger of nocturnal appearances in a balcony? and Hamlet, if I remember properly, teaches us that a belief in ghosts is all rot, and should be discouraged. Oh! yes, I am tolerably well acquainted with the moral lessons that your Swan of Avon thought proper to indulge in.'

Mr. Dagley smiled, it was useless to pursue this topic of conversation any further. Eveline had not a literary turn of mind. He touched upon lady's dress and said he thought it was rather extravagant.

'Oh! no, Mr. Dagley,' said Ada, 'a man ought never to begrudge money spent upon a woman for the purpose of adding to her charms.'

'If she pays for dressing,' remarked Eveline. 'I have heard lots of men say that you might as well dress an old cow as some women, or clothe the monument.'

'That remark will not apply to you,' said Mr. Dagley.

'Of course it won't. I am conscious of the possession of "go." I can set the Thames on fire before many girls would make the parish pump burn. If my paternal relative felt inclined to spend a pot of money in dressing me, which un-

fortunately he rarely does, he would not find it a bad investment.'

'Ladies' dresses are very low and very short now. It is the fashion I am aware, but in my opinion they begin too late and end too soon.'

'That is a clever way of putting it,' replied Eveline, 'but women are very unfairly blamed. They must follow the fashion, we cannot afford to be singular. If we were, all the men would laugh at us, and ridicule from your sex is death to us.'

James had just removed the fish and opened some Sillery Mousseaux, when the door opened and two men appeared upon the threshold.

They were Allison Mowbray and Ernest Lacy.

Miss St. Pierre became very pale, and then a rich red colour flushed her face up to the temples. Ada looked up gratefully. She seemed pleased at their coming. Not so Eveline. Raising her voice, she exclaimed, 'Mr. Mowbray, this is a most unheard-of piece of impertinence. Are you not aware, sir, that you are in my private room.'

'I beg your pardon for the intrusion,' he answered, 'I thought the terms of intimacy we were on would justify me in venturing to come upstairs without being previously announced.'

'Nothing whatever can or will justify such behaviour, and I ask you at once to go away unless you wish me to put you down as an unmitigated cad, utterly unworthy of any toleration.'

Up to this time Mr. Dagley's back had been turned to Allison Mowbray, but he now turned round. The effect of this change in his position upon Allison Mowbray was instantaneous. He was like a man suddenly transfixed by an arrow. For a moment he was paralysed. He was unable to move or speak. Eveline, thinking he was defying her, rose from her chair, and stamping her foot upon the floor, cried, 'Have you heard me, sir, or must I call in the assistance of the waiter?'

Allison Mowbray's lips parted, and the single word 'Dagley' came from them.

'I am very much at your service,' said the latter, rising in his turn; 'perhaps these ladies will excuse me if I ask for a few minutes' private conversation with you, Mr. Mowbray.'

He laid a peculiar stress upon the Mowbray, which did not escape Eveline's attention.

'I will wait for you in the coffee room,' replied Allison Mowbray recovering himself. 'Perhaps later in the evening Miss St. Pierre will feel graciously pleased to recall her harsh decree of banishment.'

Eveline bowed stiffly.

Ernest Lacy did not follow his friend out of the room. He remained, looking at Ada, who said nothing. Eveline, however, speedily settled him. 'My remarks apply to you equally with Mr. Mowbray,' she said.

'We have come after Ada by her father's orders,' replied Ernest Lacy.

'Waiter !' said Eveline, 'put that man out of the room.'

'Cert'nly, miss. Yes, miss,' replied James, going up to Ernest, and adding, 'Now, sir, if you please. The ladies can't be disturbed at dinner, and,' he said further, as he recognized him, 'you'll have the governor up presently.'

Ernest thought it prudent to retreat and he followed Mr. Mowbray into the smoking room.

'This is nice treatment,' he said, throwing himself into a chair.

Mowbray walked up and down the room uneasily and took no notice of his remark.

'I think you might have the civility to answer a fellow when he speaks to you,' continued Ernest.

Still Mowbray did not look at him, so intently was he occupied with his own thoughts.

'Cheerful, very,' muttered Ernest ; 'I shall become dismally dumb if I don't talk to somebody, better have a row with him than do nothing.'

He was about to speak again, but the expression of his companion's face was so full of a wild despair, mingled with a resolute ferocity, that he did not dare to open his mouth. Lighting a cigar, he smoked quietly, and waited the course of events.

Still Mowbray paced the floor with the same long strides. The phantoms of the past were with him and stalked by his side. Conscience was making a coward of him, as it does of us all ; and he was like a man living on the side of a mountain who dreads lest a whisper may bring down an avalanche.

Upstairs there was more serenity. Charles Danvers Dagley appeared in excellent spirits ; he laughed, talked, and joked. Eveline pacified herself, remarking—

'That the cat was out of the bag now, but she could not help fluttering her feathers at the cool cheek of the fellows, coming in without being invited.'

'You may as well know, Mr. Dagley,' she continued, 'that I have been staying with this young lady's friends at Lower-sham, and finding it so awfully slow that I was being killed by inches, I thought I would vary the monotony of our daily life and get up a little excitement. After some consideration I determined to run over to Birmingham for a few days, and say nothing to anybody about it; that accounts for our being here. Mr. Mowbray and Mr. Lacy have evidently been sent after us, and have succeeded in tracing us much more easily than I had anticipated. By-the-way, is Mowbray your friend?'

'I have seen him before,' he answered evasively.

'I mean is he the man you expected to meet?'

'No, he is not.'

'Oh!' said Eveline, 'if there is any secret about it, I don't wish you to repose confidence in me; I hate secrets. There is always something bad and underhand about them.'

'That's the reason perhaps why a lady has always a conscientious objection to keep a secret.'

Eveline bit her lip.

'Perhaps there are some secrets which a certain sort of men would not care every one to know' she retorted?'

'Very likely,' rejoined Mr. Dagley, going on with the wing of a pheasant.

When dinner was over he begged permission to go downstairs to Mr. Mowbray, saying—

'May I take him your forgiveness? Poor fellow, I will wager he is very penitent by this time.'

'So he ought to be. It's divine to forgive, isn't it? Well, for once I will be divine. Tell him he may come up and have some wine and a weed if he will promise to be a good boy, and he may bring that other mouse, Ernest Lacy, with him.'

Mr. Dagley left the room and sought Mowbray in the smoking room. He was standing near a window, and beckoned to Dagley to come to him. When he did he put his arm in that of the other, and exclaimed in a thick hoarse voice, 'What is your price? It's useless to waste time in talking. I have six thousand a-year, not a pound more; will one thousand annually, paid quarterly, satisfy you?'

‘That will do very well if you will throw in a bonus of a thou ; a thou ready money will be just what I am in want of,’ answered Dagley.

‘You shall have it.’

They then lowered their voices so that Ernest Lacy could hear no more. What he had heard did not convey any particular meaning to him. It seemed odd that a man in Mr. Mowbray’s position should talk about ‘naming a price,’ and throw thousands a-year away so recklessly ; but he fancied the two men had met after being separated for some time, and were arranging some matters of business.

When at the expiration of a quarter of an hour they came to him, both externally calm, and said that they had an invitation for him to go upstairs to the ladies, he felt as if he could rave with rapture. Every trace of the tempest of the soul which had raged within Allison Mowbray had vanished. He was again affable, smiling, and bland.

‘Am I really forgiven ?’ said Allison Mowbray, standing on the threshold of the door as if afraid to enter.

‘Oh ! yes, Ada and I have agreed to look over your indiscretion this once. Come in, and sit down. The bung—that is I believe the correct name for a landlord—the bung’s cellar is not bad, though his wine wants what improves a vintage, but not a woman.’

‘May I inquire what that is ?’ asked Mowbray.

‘Age,’ answered Eveline laughing.

‘What do you think of our flight ? Is papa very angry, Mr. Mowbray ?’ inquired Ada.

‘His mind is at ease by this time. I have sent him a telegram,’ he replied.

‘I wish you had not wired the news without consulting me. We shall have to shift our quarters or we shall be obliged to put up with the infiction of the old boy here,’ said Eveline in a tone of remonstrance.

‘I think not. Dr. Mapleson is too busy to leave just at present.

‘I hope I am grateful for small mercies,’ returned Eveline laughing.

‘Naughty girls !’ exclaimed Allison Mowbray. ‘Do you know I have strict orders to carry you home at once, and to use force if necessary.’

‘So I should think,’ answered Eveline ; ‘a very likely story ! To which of you is assigned the pleasant task of belling the

cat? I warn you to fight shy of me for I have claws and know how to use them. Seriously, Mr. Mowbray, before I go back I must have a distinct understanding.'

'Certainly.'

'In the first place I am not going to surrender at discretion. I must be permitted to march out with the honours of war. There must be no lecturing—I must not be told that I am a bad girl, and that perdition stares me in the face.'

'It would be very rude of perdition to do any such thing,' observed Mr. Dagley.

'I believe you are my friend, Mr. Dagley. I can rely upon you,' said Eveline.

'As far as my poor life goes,' he answered, 'it is very much at your service. What possible or impossible feat do you wish me to perform?'

'Only pave the way. I can't bear being bullied, and if we go back to Lowersham to-morrow you must make things easy and smooth.'

'In conjunction with Mr. Mowbray I will do my very best.'

'On these terms the matter shall be considered,' she said.

Ernest talked to Ada, but she did not give him much encouragement. She had taken a dislike to him which she found it impossible to overcome. Mr. Mowbray amused Eveline with the recital of their adventures at the hotel, and told her how they came to discover the fair runaways. Eveline laughed immoderately, and when Ada heard how Ernest had been treated by the landlord, he became more contemptible in her eyes than before.

'Oh! you killing man!' said Eveline, still laughing. 'I never heard anything so ridiculously delicious. It is the most grotesque thing! however you could have thought of it I can't imagine. You have put me in a good humour by telling me that funny story, and I consent to go back to-morrow. You and Mr. Dagley shall go on first and make peace. Mr. Lacy will accompany Ada and me. And now, as it is our last evening, let us make ourselves jolly. What do you say to cards or billiards? We can make sides, and I am game to play any one a hundred up for a fiver. You would prefer cards, eh! all of you? Very well. I am the hostess on this occasion though we are in a hotel. May I trouble you to ring the bell, Mr. Dagley? Thanks very much. Do you like cards? Yes! So glad.'

And they passed a very pleasant evening.

CHAPTER XII.

‘SENT BACK IN DISGRACE.’

THROUGH the evening Eveline once or twice spoke *sotto voce* to Mr. Dagley, and asked him questions about his friend Mr. Mowbray, which he avoided answering in a matter-of-fact manner ; so at length she said, in a disappointed tone—

‘Is there no mystery about him?’

‘None that I am aware of,’ answered Mr. Dagley.

‘You would tell me if there were, would you not?’

‘Most willingly.’

‘What a pity!’ said Eveline. ‘I had made up my mind that he had been guilty of manslaughter at least, and he has not even run away with another man’s wife. How very tame the man must be! He wouldn’t make a hero for a modern novel. There would be positively nothing romantic in his character to work upon. I begin to find him positively insipid. I had pictured him to myself desperately wicked.’

‘For purposes of fiction, he would be as you very truly say, useless,’ answered Mr. Dagley. ‘Your taste appears to be slightly vicious, if I may say so. I, for instance, have not had the questionable honour of appearing in either a civil or criminal court, and if I were to so appear, I think I should “read well.” What must you think of me?’

‘I have not taken the trouble to think of you at all,’ replied Eveline, a little offended.

‘In that case I must bestir myself,’ said Mr. Dagley. ‘Not to be thought of at all is dreadful. It is necessary to wake up, and I feel it incumbent upon me to do something without delay. Shall I get up a company? Shall I marry two wives in one week—but perhaps you would find a simple case of bigamy too tame? If I were a Spaniard, I might successfully cultivate the use of the knife. Infanticide is beneath contempt, is it not? besides, I do not know where to get my baby. Murder through jealousy—that is the sort of thing!

Eureka—as the man said when he invented the shirt—I have found it!’

‘Then you will oblige me by keeping it, and not talking nonsense,’ said Eveline, who was compelled to laugh in spite of herself.

On the following day everything was carried out as Eveline had arranged. Mr. Mowbray and Mr. Dagley started by the first train for Lowersham. The girls, with Ernest Lacy, followed more leisurely.

No one met them at the station, which was a bad sign. It looked ominous of a scolding Miss St. Pierre thought, nor was she mistaken. They walked to the doctor’s house, and found themselves the objects of much critical observation on the part of impertinent villagers. Eveline, if she looked at them at all, favoured them with glances of scathing disdain, which checked the derision that seemed anxious to find vent in words. Ernest offered Ada his arm. She was not weak enough to take it, and said, coldly—

‘Thank you, I can walk by myself. I do not stand in need of any assistance.’

Feeling himself woefully snubbed, he thought he would retaliate by offering to Eveline, who was quite equal to the occasion, and said—

‘Thank you, no. If you had come to me first, I might have honoured you, but I don’t care about second-hand compliments.’

So he lagged behind, and walking by himself, chewed the cud of reflection.

The door of the doctor’s house was opened by the servant, with a grin on her face.

‘Please, miss,’ she said, ‘the doctor wants to see you in his study. Miss Ada, you ma’s waiting for you in the drawing-room.’

‘A judicious division of force,’ replied Eveline, adding—
‘Tell Mr. Mapleson I am going to my room, and if he wants me, he will find me in the garden in ten minutes.’

Ada, not so resolute as her friend, went into the drawing-room, and soon the sound of an elevated voice was heard, followed by loud sobs.

‘Oh, my, ain’t Miss Ada catching it!’ was the domestics, comment, as she listened in the hall.

When Ada entered the room, Mrs. Mapleson, who was

alone, exclaimed, in a sterner voice than she had ever yet employed towards her daughter—

‘Misguided girl. You have been guilty of a folly that I did not think any child of mine would be silly enough to give way to, and why? I do not blame you so much as I do your bold, bad, wicked cousin. She has influenced you, poor, weak creature! But she shall go, and you—you shall no longer be an inmate of my house, unless a very decided change for the better takes place in your character.’

Ada was unable to withstand this impetuous torrent of vituperation. The pent up vial of wrath, when released, overwhelmed her. The excitement which had, ever since she left Lowersham, kept her up, had often made her feel inclined to cry, and, giving vent to her tears, she wept bitterly, scolding loudly—

‘If you wish to be looked upon as one who is utterly worthless,’ continued her mother, ‘you could not pursue a better course to effect your object than the one you have adopted. These madcap pranks make people talk; what will be thought of you?’

Softening, as she beheld the girl’s violent sorrow, Mrs. Mapleson went on—

‘You know, my dear child, that I only speak for your good. I would much rather at any time praise than blame you. Should I, however, be doing my duty, if I allowed you to go headlong to destruction without warning you and stretching forth my hand to hold you back from the abyss that yawns at your feet.’

Ada threw herself upon a sofa, and, burying her face in her hands, continued to give free scope to her grief. Mrs. Mapleson waited till the paroxysm was over, knowing such violent emotion would soon exhaust itself, and in the course of five minutes Ada was calmer, but she was not reduced to the humble and penitent state of mind which her mother had hoped to see.

‘Come, my dear,’ exclaimed Mrs. Mapleson; ‘kneel down by my side, tell me you are sorry and I will say no more to you. It may be a lesson to you. Eveline shall not, will not, stay an hour longer in this house to corrupt you, be assured of that.’

‘Eveline going?’ said Ada, looking up through her tears.

‘Yes, that has been fully decided upon by your father.’

'Then,' said Ada, spiritedly, 'I can only characterise such conduct as a shameful abuse of hospitality. What harm has she done?'

'Can you ask?' replied Mrs. Mapleson, astonished.

'I not only can, but do. I am not a child, and will not be treated as one. Deny me a home here, and I will find one with Eveline, in London.'

'That is what she has taught you to say—she has told you to defy me. What a viper have I been nourishing in my bosom! But we will not talk any further now, neither of us are in a fit state; you will only say things for which you would be sorry afterwards, and I will pray that God in his mercy may turn your heart.'

So saying Mrs. Mapleson quitted the drawing-room, and Ada, still crying, sought the window. She saw Eveline in the garden, walking slowly up and down with her father, and she did not join them, feeling that her presence was not required at such a juncture.

When Eveline had arranged her hair, washed her face and hands, and provided herself with a clean handkerchief, she descended to the garden. The servant had given Mr. Mapleson her message, and the doctor was awaiting his visitor's coming. He was deeply incensed at her thoughtless behaviour, but he did not forget that she was his niece and his guest, to whom all courtesy was due.

Always an advocate for the taking the bull by the horns sort of way of meeting difficulties, Eveline exclaimed, as soon as they met, 'Now, Dr. Mapleson, what have you to say to me?'

'Not much, Eveline,' he replied, 'and what I have to say will be uttered more in sorrow than in anger. Your conduct has lately been of such an eccentric nature that it almost leads staid sedate country people, like my wife, to doubt your sanity. I am aware that it proceeds from a reckless habit of thinking, or rather want of right thought, still I cannot look over an offence such as that of which you have been guilty. It is impossible that you should remain any longer under my roof. I have written to your father to tell him to expect you, fully explaining everything to him.'

'Don't labour under any misapprehension,' said Eveline. 'I have no wish whatever to stay in your house, though I gratefully acknowledge the kindness I have received both from

yourself and Mrs. Mapleson. You have but anticipated my decision to leave your house in a few days, but you need not imagine that I am to be treated quite like a school girl and sent away home at a moment's notice. Of course I can't prevent you from sending my luggage to the station, nor can I prevent you from closing your doors against me and giving your servants orders not to admit me, but if that course is adopted I shall go to the principal inn in the village, and there stop until I think fit to go back to London.'

'I know, my dear child,' replied the doctor, in the same kind calm tone of voice, 'that you in your short-sighted folly——'

'Don't abuse me, if you please,' interrupted Eveline. 'I hope I have conducted myself as a lady in speaking to you. I shall expect the same treatment from you in return, as I should expect from any other gentleman. We will put the relationship existing between us on one side, if you please, for the moment.'

'As you please. I was only about to observe that you, no doubt, think yourself infinitely superior to poor, half-and-half country people like us—what should people buried in Derbyshire know? I will tell you. We know the difference between right and wrong. You talk of progress and think you have made it, but what sort of progress? Is it towards paradise or the devil? You see things through a distorted medium of balls, parties, and compliments from men. What do these men think of girls of which you are a type. Pray don't interrupt me. I shall not weary your patience long—they laugh at and despise you, and talk against you when your back is turned, in a way that would make your ears tingle if you heard them, indifferent and bold as you are. If your idea of fashion prompts you to wear your dress lower in the evening than decency suggests, you will hear them say that you should not do it did you belong to them. They look at you and talk of you, as they would to meretricious painted things, decked out in faded tawdry whom they meet at places of public resort——'

'If you must declaim,' interrupted Eveline again, 'please do so on a sound basis. I do not number amongst my acquaintance any such men as you have mentioned.'

'Ah! well, the truth of what I say will come home to you some day,' resumed the doctor. 'Mock me if you will, I am your uncle, and I have a right to speak to you, and I feel that

I ought to exercise my right all the more because you have attempted to lead my eldest daughter astray and to alienate her affections from her family. She has failed in her proper respect both to her mother and myself ever since you have been in Lowersham.'

'I don't think you are justified in saying that to me, Mr. Mapleson,' exclaimed Eveline in an injured tone; 'I feel hurt, because I have not deserved it. To hear you, any one would think you were the sternest moralist and I a degraded being. I will not bear it. I would not permit my own father to talk to me as you have ventured to do.'

'But you must and shall hear me,' cried Dr. Mapleson, raising his voice; 'I wish my daughter to make a respectable wife, and be the happy mother of children!'

'It is a matter of the most perfect indifference to me if she has as many children as the old woman who lived in a shoe,' replied Eveline, with a smile.

'You call yourself her friend.'

'I am not aware that I have treated her as an enemy.'

'Indeed you have, and as an enemy of the worst kind. You have worn a mask so that she could not see the repulsive aspect of the worst side of your character, and——'

'Really, Mr. Mapleson, you are passing all bounds, and are giving yourself the license of a raw medical student, who thinks that to bluster is an attribute of a gentleman. Whatever else you have to say to me, be good enough to put in writing. It is time that this unseemly altercation should come to an end. I am now going to an inn and will send a porter for my luggage. The dresses which I have allowed your daughter to wear she is at liberty to keep.'

'That is adding insult to injury.'

'If you like to think so; I should not consider that anybody insulted me if they made me a present of half-a-dozen dresses as good as new.'

Eveline walked away, and the doctor stood still biting his thumb-nail. He was at a loss how to deal with this girl; she was so totally different to anything he had met with or had expected to come in contact with.

He had half a mind to run after her and try to get her into conversation again, but while he was standing irresolute she had gone. As Eveline passed the drawing-room window she

saw Ada and kissed her hand to her. Throwing open the case-ment Ada said—

‘Are you going, Evie?’

‘At once, and I shall not stand upon the order of my going. Your father has attacked me in what I call a gross manner, and I do not choose to allow myself to be subjected to such verbal fury. You will find me at the Mowbray Arms here in Lowersham for the next four-and-twenty hours at all events, should you be permitted to call upon me.’

‘I hope, dear, there is no cessation of our friendship?’

‘On my part none; I am willing to be as Siamese as ever.’

‘I am so glad to hear you say so. I feared that all was at an end between us,’ said Ada.

‘Silly child.’

‘And you will not send me away if I come to you in London?’

‘Certainly not; you will always be a welcome guest wherever I may happen to be, though you know I am a sad peripatetic, and hate and detest staying in one place for any length of time. Gussy Spalding once told me that I was the nearest approach to perpetual motion he had ever met with, and as he was a stay-at-home sort of fellow I believe that was why he did not marry me. He was eligible, and I think I should have had him if he had asked; but there are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it. Lay that flattering unction to your heart, dear, when a man treats you badly, and revenge yourself upon the perfidious sex by wholesale flirting.’

Seeing that Dr. Mapleson had collected himself and was coming up the garden walk, she smiled farewell and went on. In the street she met Arthur Monteagle, who stopped and spoke to her, saying something about his pleasure at seeing the lost sheep again.

‘Oh! I’m worse than that—a lost sheep is a thing of grace to me,’ she exclaimed; ‘I am an outcast—a veritable outcast. I am, indeed.’

Then she told him all that had happened. They went to the Mowbray arms together, where she secured rooms, hoping thereby to scandalize the good doctor. Ordering dinner at seven, she invited Arthur Monteagle to dine with her, and told him to bring Reginald Hall and Percy Kendal with him; he, delighted, consented at once. A note despatched to Silver Pines, asking Mr. Allison Mowbray to the dinner, brought

back a polite refusal. He had, he said, given an invitation to his friend, Mr. Dagley, and would come over early in the morning.

This made Eveline think that there was something more beneath the surface than peeped forth. 'Depend upon it, she said to herself, 'that man is a hero of romance, though I cannot unravel the mystery. Mr. Dagley knows more—much more than he chooses to tell.'

CHAPTER XIII.

'IN TOWN.'

FOR two days Eveline St. Pierre remained at the Mowbray Arms, asserting her independence ; her luggage was sent on there by the doctor, who made no overtures to her, nor did any member of his family visit her. The presumption was that Ada was kept a close prisoner. Eveline thought she would certainly have come. Visions of bread and water, and her friend locked up in an empty room, with nothing but that spare diet to subsist upon, floated before her. Each day she hired a basket-carriage, and drove past the doctor's house. Mr. Mapleson was gratified by receiving the approval of all his friends, who much applauded the course he had adopted.

On Eveline's arrival in town, she drove at once to her father's residence in Eaton Square ; having been a spoiled child she was still the pet of her family, and did as she liked. She did not fear reproach from them, and knew that she should make her mother laugh at the account of the 'savages' with which she intended to amuse her.

When she arrived at Eaton Square, she found her mother lying on a sofa reading a novel recently issued from the press. She was a lady of about five-and-forty years of age, in an excellent state of preservation. Her face was not guiltless of rouge, and she was inclined to hide the ravages of time by the exercise of those arts which ladies employ to make themselves look younger than they really are. She did not rise as her daughter entered the room, nor did she evince any maternal feeling ; she contented herself with exclaiming—

'Oh, it is you, Evie ; back at last—whatever have you found to keep you so long down there?'

Eveline replied—

'I can't positively talk till I have had a glass of wine. I am choked with the dust—parched up—dry as a chip with so much travelling.'

She rang the bell, and when her wants were supplied she began to talk. During her silence Mrs. St. Pierre had gone on with her book with the utmost indifference.

'The country was agreeable, and there were a few nice men,' said Eveline; 'time was difficult to kill, but it was a change, you know.'

'What's all this that Mapleson has been writing to your father about?' inquired Mrs. St. Pierre. 'I knew there was something I had to ask you.'

'I took a run over to Birmingham without telling any one where I was going.'

'They found you dining with a strange man, didn't they?'

'I did not expect that of you,' replied Eveline, a little petulantly; 'it is very much to be regretted that you are so ready to believe everything people say. Suppose I had a dozen men dining with me, what then?'

'It would be rather better than one. But I really don't care, my dear. You are the best judge of your own actions. I don't wish to dictate,' returned Mrs. St. Pierre mildly, 'only these things get about. You will find it difficult to get off if you do not take care. I should advise you to look out for a husband. It alters everything; you can do as you like then. By all means get married, Evie. It is not often that I give you advice.'

'Thank goodness, no,' answered Eveline.

'We need not quarrel about it. Though while I am on the subject I will say that you might do worse than marry old Lord D'Estanger; you know how very sweet he was on you at Baden.'

'That old stick,' exclaimed Eveline contemptuously; 'why he has got one foot in the grave!'

'Which interesting fact makes him very much more estimable. He has twenty thousand a-year, so your papa says, and you know he generally gets at the bottom of these things. Of course he will settle a liberal fortune upon you, and at an early age you may find yourself a young and good-looking widow with a handsome income; for my part, I cannot imagine anything more charming.'

'Certainly, mama,' rejoined Eveline, 'you have a way of putting the case which alters its complexion very materially. It shall receive serious consideration.'

'Lady Wareham has quite set her heart on the match.'

'Very kind of her ladyship, I am sure.'

'She receives next Thursday, and has a drum on Tuesday. At one or the other she has promised to have old D'Estanger present, and he may come to her first ball on the twenty-seventh, though he rather avoids balls. At his age dancing is out of the question, and what is odd, he is too fond of the society of ladies to care for the card-room. I am convinced that if you don't have him some one else will. The word has gone forth that he is a marrying man, and mamas, with daughters to provide for, are girding themselves for battle. He will be snapped up infallibly.'

'What a farce—nothing more dreadful under the sun. Quite a caricature on humanity. The incarnation of an ugly gorilla, I should say, repulsive to the last degree,' observed Eveline.

'Twenty thousand a-year, my dear, would make the most atrociously hideous man one can imagine appear beautiful. Consider him gilded. Look at him through a vista of carriages, horses, dresses, jewels, and all the rest of it. Is he not a little more bearable?'

'A little. He shall be thought of. I will go to Lady Wareham's drum,' replied Eveline.

'Do, my dear, and pay a little attention to poor D'Estanger, if it is only for the satisfaction of cutting other girls out. I know he gives you the preference. It really is time you should settle. You are not so young as you were, my darling. Don't be angry—don't storm. My nerves are not in order for a scene to-day. But this I will say—three years of London fashionable life don't tend to make a girl——'

'That will do, my nerves are out of order too,' interrupted Eveline. 'One thing I am certain of, and that is, I will marry better than you did when I do marry.'

'I don't think you have anything to complain of,' said Mrs. St. Pierre, mildly. She was always mild, because it was too much trouble to be anything else. 'St. Pierre was very well off, and if he is not quite so rich as he was, it is the fault of our united extravagances. There is not a thing either of us ever asked for, he refused. The other day he was complaining of your recklessness, when a bill came in from Streeter, for jewellery, which was more than he thought you ought to have got in debt for; but he soon left off grumbling, and gave Mr. Streeter a check, which put an end to that little trouble.'

‘One must dress and look nice or one has no chance,’ explained Eveline.

‘I don’t want to argue the point. I only tell you what I think. You know I hate argument. It is such a worry, and I have such a charming book here, all about love and seduction, and subsequent suicide ; quite absorbing, I assure you.’

‘Is town filling?’

‘Fast, dear, very fast. Everybody is up. You know the House sits and the park is getting quite gay again.’

Eveline went to her own apartment and rang for her maid, leaving her mother to finish her interesting novel at her leisure.

CHAPTER XIV

'AT LADY WAREHAM'S.'

MR. ST. PIERRE did not say anything to Eveline about her eccentric behaviour at Lowersham. It was his wife's place, he thought, to lecture her. Let a mother manage the girls, and a father the boys, he was very fond of saying, and as he had no boys he got out of the difficulty very well. Mr. St. Pierre was an exquisite, he cared for little else than driving, riding, dressing well, appearing at very good houses, and going to the one or two West End clubs he belonged to. He was a Frenchman of family and fortune, but he had been so much in England that in appearance and voice he was quite English. The effeminate habits of his youth, though, he found it difficult to throw off, and he always went out with a gun and a dog, with fear and trembling, and never rode to hounds without a fervent prayer for safety.

These were concessions he very unwillingly made to our insular prejudices. He was essentially selfish, and was notorious for his intrigues, but Mrs. St. Pierre, being a woman of the world, took no notice of rumours which were brought her by good-natured friends, and solaced herself with flirtations at Baden and Homberg. Her husband made ample provision for her *ménage*. He did not stint her in the matter of money, and she considered that it was not within her province to interfere with his innocent amusements, provided they were not too glaring and flagrant. If she had acted otherwise a separation would have been the result. This she wished to avoid, and did so. Scandal was done away with, and the world spoke of the St. Pierres as a happy couple. They were happy, each in his and her own way, but their happiness was not that solid old-fashioned domestic joy which is the boast of so many English homes. It was the unsubstantial butterfly sort of delight which is artificial, shallow, and fleeting. They each had their hearburnings, their dark moments, and their bitter reveries. The past was unpleasant

to dwell upon, the present was uncertain, and the future was a dismal blank.

Lady Wareham, to whose kettledrum Eveline was going, was a widow. She had married a general in the line who had been made a K.C.B. for some brilliant performance in the field, and at his death she strove to be a leader of *ton*. In this effort she succeeded admirably, her fortune was sufficient for all her purposes, and she got very good men and women to come to her house, any one doubtful she tabooed at once. As a match-maker she was unrivalled, and many had to regret ever having accepted the invitations which Lady Wareham showered so liberally upon her friends. She was rather proud of having men connected with literature and art at her parties. Often would she take some one aside and point out a new lion, saying 'That is a literary man, he writes those tremendous leaders in the *Daily full of Chaff*, or,' 'Do you see that young bar-rister, he has a novel in contemplation which will make a sensation I assure you; it is directed against the vices of society, and called "Clothing the Skeleton." I have read a part of it, and it will I venture to say eclipse all his other efforts, and they are not a few;' or, 'There is Mr. Burnt Sienna, what a picture his was in the last academy-show! he is good enough to paint my portrait;' or, 'That is the Editor of the *Weekly Clown*, the best comic paper we have, quite a party man, goes everywhere, is received at the Countess of Semaphores', and you know to be seen there is an introduction everywhere;' or, 'There is Mr. Grosvenor Johnson, he is the proprietor of the *Cynical Smiler* and *Sardonic Grins*, with what a vengeance they attack the vices and follies of the day. He is a little tufty, *mais que voulez vous?* We cannot all be patricians and it is well that some should look up to those who are. There again is Mr. Harrow Tenderdean, quite a pet of mine, such spirits, such a flow, wonderful, my good sir; he is legal, one of the Temples; I think he married well, ah! he is alone. Naughty man, he has not brought his wife, what shall I do to him? He and Grosvenor Johnson are always together, quite Siamese I do assure you, though what the link is between them I cannot tell, I am at a loss. He writes, I am told, though he does not want it known. I have read something I was informed was his in the *Saturday Snarler*, and again in the *Fashionable Fig-Leaf*. Ah! there is the member for Faver-ingham; we shall have all the talent here to-night, I must go. Forgive me for rushing away, we shall meet again.'

The best of Lady Wareham's parties was that every one did as they liked, the rooms were very large, and all sorts of quite corners and little conservatories were continually opening up to the view. Never was there such a house for flirting; half the matches in the season were commenced, continued, or ended in her ladyship's drawing-rooms.

Eveline arrived at the drum at four o'clock and there was then a fair sprinkling of the *élite*.

'Dear, dear girl,' cried Lady Wareham, kissing Eveline, 'where have you been, where did your cruel fate send you for your sins? I heard vague rumours of your being at a village in Derbyshire, how dreadful? But here you are again, and I am consoled, though what I have done without you I cannot tell, I always call you my right hand—are you not my right hand?'

This was the way her ladyship flattered every one, and Eveline, who was not deceived by it, replied—

'I was recruiting in the country. I shall be better able to bear the fatigues of London life now.'

'Fatigue! a young lady ought never to talk of fatigue. Not even when she has been to three balls every night for three months.' Lowering her voice, she added, 'I expect Lord you-know-who here presently. He promised faithfully, he did, indeed. What is there I would not do for you, dear child? Am I not your friend?'

'I hope so, sincerely,' responded Eveline, with a half smile.

At this moment Mr. Grosvenor Johnson entered the room, with Mr. Harrow Tenterdean. They both wore frock coats, and had a carnation in the button-hole. Lady Wareham was at their side in a moment. She always ran from one to the other of her guests and put them at their ease in a moment.

'How kind of you!' she exclaimed, 'to leave that dear precious money-making old city too, for such humble attractions as I can offer! How are you—and you Mr. Tenterdean? I always call you my pet, you know.'

'But you have so many pets, I am afraid, Lady Wareham,' answered the young barrister.

'Ah! but you are my particular pet. You don't know what I have done for you. Come nearer—bend down—give me your ear—that is it. I have spoken to the Premier about the Governorship of the Wildgoose Islands, and your name is positively put down for the appointment. There, could I do more if you were my own son? Now say you are not glad to see me if you dare, *méchant!*'

'If there is one countenance more than another which it gives me pleasure to see, it is yours, Lady Wareham,' rejoined Mr. Harrow Tenterdean, in a florid style peculiar to him. 'There is a wealth of goodnature in your truly lovely face, and a mine of excellence in your truly admirable character which at once commands respect, and compels all who have the extreme felicity of calling themselves your friends to render homage to sterling moral worth, which is its inalienable due.'

Mr. Grosvenor Johnson was all this time looking round the room, and when he got an opportunity of speaking, he said—

'Quite a distinguished assemblage, Lady Wareham—dear me, yes. But you always gather around you the stars of fashion.'

'You are too good—only the usual crowd.'

'Excuse me—there is Lord Pumphandle, and Sir Henry Blatherum, and Archdeacon Sangster's nephew, and Colonel Tallboy's son, and Cotterall Fastgoe in the Admiralty, and Sydenham Palace who married Lady Archibald de Tompkins Jones, and——'

'Don't, don't overwhelm me,' exclaimed Lady Wareham, fluttering her fan to hide her laughter. 'I shall think I have the Court newsman.'

'I haven't half done,' said Mr. Grosvenor Johnson, who was happily ignorant of the ridicule of which he was making himself the object. 'I can see Long Primer and Small Pica, the authors—written forty novels each of them, if they've done a line. Long Primer's a wonderful fellow, particular friend of mine, was seven years at Eton, is called to the bar, but prefers the flowery paths of literature to the lucrative groove of commerce, or the distinguished career which a member of the forensic profession has before him. He has written more than Sir Walter Scott, and is not yet thirty.'

'Lopez de Vega *redivivus*,' suggested her ladyship.

'My dear Grosvenor,' said Harrow Tenterdean, 'while you are occupying yourself in cataloguing the celebrities, whom it is Lady Wareham's pleasure and occupation to gather together in her drawing room, you forget that you are uttering that which is no news to our amiable hostess, and occupying her valuable time with what I am sure you will forgive me for calling twiddle twaddle.'

'Ah! yes. But—there's Lord D'Estanger, 'pon my word, the peerage is amply represented. Did not I see him at——'

'Margate last year. You know you were there, Grosvenor, interrupted Harrow Tenterdean with a laugh, determined to put a stop to his vulgarity. 'Don't deny it. I was there too and saw you, I admit it. I have not been a lawyer all these years not to know the value of an admission—we had tea and shrimps together on the cliff at ninepence a-head, and you said you never ate better in your life, though you could get them for eightpence at Hampstead or find good accommodation at Kew and hot water cheap if you brought your own tea.'

'Oh! you sad rattle,' cried Lady Wareham, smiling at Mr. Harrow Tenterdean, 'but it is so like you. I cannot find it in my heart to scold you. I must run away now and attend to D'Estanger—how poorly he looks! I leave you to make your peace with Mr. Johnson.'

'Don't omit the Grosvenor,' suggested Harrow Tenterdean *sotto voce*.

With another smile and another playful shake of her fan, Lady Wareham ran away, and Mr. Johnson, turning angrily to his friend, said—

'I don't think after lending you that additional fifty this morning you ought to turn me into ridicule—chaff's very well in its way; I don't like it. You have gone to the end of your tether, sir. Margate! shrimps! what will her ladyship think of me? I was going to say Baden—who could contradict me? Never cry stinking fish in your own set. No, I am disappointed, I thought you were my friend.'

'So I am, Grosvenor,' replied Harrow Tenterdean, 'and I'll undertake to get your legs under Lord D'Estanger's mahogany; he knows the Lord Lieutenant of Middlesex, and he will put you in the commission of the peace. I know it is your highest ambition to be a J.P.'

'Not my highest,' answered Grosvenor Johnson, catching at this tempting bait so judiciously thrown out. 'But will you really manage this for me?'

'Of course I will. Consider it done. Say no more about it.'

'By my life, Tenterdean, you can do it,' exclaimed Grosvenor Johnson gleefully. 'I never saw such a fellow—you can do it, sir. You can take the shine out of them. By my life, sir.'

Eveline was sitting on a sofa by herself, in a retired part of the room when Lord D'Estanger entered. To this safe retreat Lady Wareham conducted his lordship, who walked slowly along, looking infirm if not decrepit. He was between fifty and sixty years of age, and had never been handsome, though he could not at any period of his life have been so unnaturally ugly as Eveline had endeavoured to make him out. He was tall, though bent in the back, and there was a quiet dignity about him which repelled anything like ridicule. His medical adviser recommended him to marry, and he was looking out for a wife, seeking one whom he could love; but Eveline very truly described his wants and condition when she said—

‘He wants a woman who will be a nurse for him, as he gets weaker year by year, and instead of thinking of marriage he ought to turn his attention to patching up his soul for heaven!’

A flush of pleasure mantled his face when he saw Eveline, and he addressed her with all the polished suavity which had distinguished him when he had been a page at the brilliant court of George IV. Eveline made room for him on the sofa, and Lady Wareham, leaving them together, said—

‘I forbid all flirting; you must forget the traditions of your youth, my lord, for this young lady is under my especial protection, and I cannot have her affections trifled with.’

‘I hope I am not given to such despicable trivialities,’ said Lord D'Estanger. ‘If Miss St. Pierre will condescend to allow me to talk to her, I will promise faithfully not to say anything with which the most demure damsel could find fault; will that——’

‘On that understanding I leave you together. If you transgress, you know the penalty—exclusion from the abode of bliss, as that witty Harrow Tenterdean calls my realm of delight, and eternal forfeiture of my friendship.’

‘Terrible!’ exclaimed Lord D'Estanger, holding up his hands. ‘We must indeed be careful not to incur such heavy displeasure.’

With a laugh the indefatigable Lady Wareham was at the other end of the room in a moment, chatting away gaily with some new arrivals. The tea was brought in, and handed round by tall footmen in livery.

Lord D'Estanger devoted himself entirely to Eveline, in whose society it was clear he took unqualified delight.

‘You do not approve of flirting, I hope?’ he said.

Although it was Eveline’s daily and hourly occupation, she replied in the negative.

‘I have heard there are many ways of flirting,’ continued his lordship. ‘A girl can flirt with her pocket-handkerchief, having previously arranged a code of signals. For instance, dropping a handkerchief may mean, “Let us be friends,” or “I like you,” picking it up “indifference,” passing it across the lips may signify, “I want a kiss,” putting it in your pocket, “I hate you,” and so on for an endless succession of changes. How expressive is this! and yet not a word is spoken.’

‘I can see that you have some knowledge of the art, or you would not be so *au fait* at its description. Ah, Lord D’Estanger, I shall begin to believe what people say of you,’ said Eveline.

The aged peer crimsoned with delight. It was his dearest wish to be thought a wicked man among women, and he cried—

‘No. On my word, it is but what a girl confessed to me at Nice in the winter. But tell me, what do people say of me?’

‘In the first place, that you are a gay deceiver.’

‘I protest—that’s too harsh. I who never broke a heart in my life.’

‘Am I to believe that?’

‘Certainly, what else do they say? Pray tell me.’

‘That you are irresistible. A girl cannot help loving you if you make up your mind that she shall. When you have secured the poor too confiding creature’s affection you trample upon it, and throw the priceless thing aside. That is your reputation, Lord D’Estanger, and I must study my own safety by steeling my heart against your fascination.’

Lord D’Estanger was delighted. He thought Eveline a most clever and at the same time charming young lady, and he replied—

‘You have exaggerated a little, but I will plead guilty to the main portion of your charge. I have made a few conquests in my time; I could never yet meet with one whom I did not deem a fortune hunter. I have always sought to be loved for myself.’

‘Oh, good gracious!’ exclaimed Eveline, ‘what next?’

She thought it inadvisable to flatter him too much or he might think she was trying to ingratiate herself with an object.

‘Is it so impossible?’ he asked.

‘Is what impossible? I do not understand.’

‘That I should be loved for myself. You told me at Baden last year that you could love a man much older than yourself; that you did not care for young men, and that you preferred in fact one whom you could look up to; was it not so? You see that I have not forgotten you or what you said.’

‘I am glad to think I made such a favourable impression upon you,’ said Eveline, casting down her eyes as if to conceal some blushes, which was proper on the occasion.

‘A most favourable one; and I may tell you that I should not have been here this afternoon, had I not expected to meet you here. It was that hope and that alone which brought me. I do not fancy you are a frivolous girl. I tell you that seriously. I don’t believe that your sole happiness consists in quizzing your acquaintance; you would not go to church and wait anxiously for the benediction, and do nothing during the service but note how becomingly dressed Miss So-and-so is, or how destitute of taste is Mrs. This-and-that, and dwell upon the artistic curl of some gentleman’s tawny moustache.’

A tawny moustache was Eveline’s pet weakness but she did not say so.

‘I should be sorry to be thought such a girl as you have described, Lord D’Estanger,’ she said.

‘I know you would. Perhaps I shall have more to say to you on this subject another time, when we are better acquainted. We shall be friends, I hope.’

‘I hope so.’

‘We must try and meet often. I will go out more for your sake, though it is a sad trial for me to go about. May I ask how long you have been out now?’

‘This is my third year.’

It was her fourth. But prudence dictated the fiction.

‘That is two. I will tell you why I asked,’ said his lordship; ‘I have an idea that all girls like gaiety at first, only at first mind. The vicious like it always, but when a sensible girl has seen the pomps and vanities of the world which are revealed in fashionable society, she is, as my theory has it, anxious to settle down and live quietly. Am I right?’

‘I believe so.’

‘That is what I expected you to say. You know that as far as you are concerned it would be so. Very proper; a good girl, I am sure.’

'Here is Lady Wareham again. She is evidently going to speak to you, Lord D'Estanger,' exclaimed Eveline, 'I shall see you again before you go.'

Rising she tripped away to the other end of the room where she saw some young ladies of her acquaintance, as she said to herself—

'I have had half-an-hour of him and that is enough, goodness knows; I cannot stand the old bore any longer. Fancy being his wife. But one could keep him at a distance or have a separation.'

Lady Wareham was tired to death; she had been running about and talking, she said, just as if she were a piece of mechanism, a thing wound up and warranted to go a certain time. She would stop and have a sensible five minutes with Lord D'Estanger, who was enchanted with the prospect.

'A very pleasant girl that,' said his lordship. 'Quite my style.'

'Miss St. Pierre, you mean,' observed Lady Wareham.

'Yes, we are old acquaintances, you know, and shall be I hope fast friends. Can you tell me if she has the reputation of being circumspect? Is she heart-whole?'

'I can answer for it. She may have had a little sensation of Cupid, as who has not? but the vestal fire burns brightly.'

'There has been no engagement? and she is not mercenary?'

'As you say.'

'Nothing could be better. Dear Lady Wareham you must bestir yourself in this matter for me. You must add one more favour to those which you have already heaped upon me, and prepare this young lady's mind for my addresses. This is strictly confidential between us, of course.'

'Oh, certainly. I will exert myself to the utmost, and I venture to predict with the happiest results.'

'I am the most fortunate of men,' cried Lord D'Estanger, highly elated.

'And I the happiest of women, for you have provided me with congenial occupation.'

'You like bringing people together and making matches?'

'It is my adoration,' answered Lady Wareham; 'in what better way can one occupy oneself than in rendering people who love one another happy. I believe in the happiness of married life for I have experienced it.'

Eveline went home about six o'clock with the firm conviction that she had but to wait her time and Lord D'Estanger would be hers. This great prize in the matrimonial lottery would be won without an effort. But Lady Wareham's parting words rang in her ears—

'You must be circumspect. D'Estanger is weak and trusting, but he must not be trifled with.'

Could she be circumspect?

That was the question.

CHAPTER XV.

'A NEW MAN.'

SIX weeks elapsed and the London season was at its height.

Eveline had written twice to Ada Mapleson, receiving no answer, and the conclusion she came to was that her friends would not let her have the letters. To write letters was always an effort with Eveline, and she did not care about taking the trouble to write any more. Feeling curious, however, about her country cousin, she prevailed upon her mother to write to Mrs. Mapleson and make inquiries. This course brought a reply from head-quarters.

This was what Mrs. Mapleson said—

Ada's conduct had been so bad ever since Miss St. Pierre left Lowersham that she defied control. Severe measures had been adopted with her, such as confinement to her apartment, and the parson of the parish even had been called in to admonish her without avail. The case was desperate. Ada became more stubborn and defiant every day and desired that she might go out as a governess. 'Reluctant as we were to assent to this suggestion,' continued Mrs. Mapleson, 'and knowing to what annoyances and indignities she would be exposed in a subordinate capacity amongst strangers, we were, nevertheless, compelled to give way. A fortnight ago Ada left Lowersham to take the post of governess in a London family, we having previously ascertained that they were thoroughly respectable and God-fearing. Having made her own choice, we shall listen to no complaints which our daughter may make. She has agreed to stay with the people for twelve months, and for that time we have resolved she shall maintain herself by her own exertions. I do not tell you the name of the family, my dear sister, because we have a particular wish that Ada may not, in her present frame of mind at least, come in contact with Miss St. Pierre, to whose levity of conduct and pernicious advice we fear the disastrous disobedience of our child is chiefly owing.'

A piece of impertinence,' broke in Eveline, at this point, as the letter was being read to her. 'If I only knew where Ada was I'd have her here and defy Mr. Mapleson, and all the other Maplesons. Poor girl!'

The letter concluded with a sort of prayer for Eveline's reformation, and a sincere hope that she would not come to any harm through her thoughtlessness.

'That's so much cant,' said Eveline. 'There is no charity in it. It is all "I am so glad I am better than you are."'

'My sister was always like that,' remarked Mrs. St. Pierre; 'we never affected one another's society.'

'I should think not,' replied Eveline, 'it would have been odd if you had and I should not have liked you. They are going just the right way to drive that girl mad and make her do something foolish.'

'Shall you go in the park to day?' asked Mrs. St. Pierre.

'Yes, I will go with you, if you will lend me the carriage, first to call on the Marshams. I have not seen them since I have been back from the country.'

'You can have it, my dear. I wanted to ask you if you have seen the new man people speak about. He is prodigiously rich, they say, and spends his money like a prince. Your papa met him at a club and played high at bacarat with him, winning several hundred pounds. He drives a pair in the park every day. Stoke Newington his name is.'

'I have not seen him. My set are not likely to know him. Is he city?'

'Not at all. His father had some land in a part of London which has been built over, and that is how he gets his money. Bricks and mortar.'

'Some cad or other,' said Eveline, and with this off-hand remark she dismissed him as unworthy of any further attention.

When the carriage came round Eveline ordered the coachman to drive to Hyde Park Gardens. The footman touched his hat, sprang on the box, and away rattled the well appointed equipage, drawn by two splendid bays. Mrs. Marsham was at home, and so were the two Misses Marshams. There were four daughters in all; two were 'out.' The other two remained under the care of a governess, before going for a year or two to a finishing school. When Eveline entered, she saw a gentleman whose face was strange to her. He was of the

middle height, passable as to looks, very dark, rather overdressed and dissipated in appearance. Her surprise was great when he was introduced to her as Mr. Stoke Newington. She gave him a stiff bow, followed by a supercilious stare, and began to talk to one of the Misses Marsham, the eldest being engaged in a desperate effort to make herself agreeable to the new man. He, on his part, was piqued by Eveline's slightly contemptuous manner and addressed one or two remarks to her, to which she answered in monosyllables. Once she yawned.'

'I must say,' he exclaimed, 'that you have the most accomplished way of yawning. I never saw any one express a desire for sleep in a more charming manner.'

'Am I to suppose from that,' she said 'that ladies usually yawn when in your society?'

'I did not say so,' he answered.

'I could quite have believed you if you had,' retorted Eveline, adding to Cora Marsham 'you were saying, my dear——'

'Oh, yes, that the opera was crowded, I never saw a more brilliant house. The singing was superb.'

Mr. Stoke Newington rose to go, he had an appointment; he said. He looked at Eveline rather confusedly, and she favoured him with a very slight inclination of the head. When he was gone, Cora Marsham said—

'How dreadfully you snubbed the poor man, Eveline, but you always do, and yet men seem to like you none the less for it.'

'He is what I call a bumptious sort of cad, and would have bustled me,' answered Eveline.

'What do you mean?' asked Mrs. Marsham. 'I can never keep myself *au courant* with your funny sayings.'

'Why, he would talk a woman down, and bustle her out of an independent opinion, that is, if she happened to have one, which is very rare with the bread-and-butter, milk-and-water girls of the present time. The man wanted setting down, and I only taught him his proper place.'

'I believe he comes here to look after our governess,' said Cora. 'Mabel, my elder sister, may think differently, but I have my own opinion.'

'He only saw her once,' replied Mabel, looking spitefully at her sister.

What of that ? Is it any reason why he should not want to see her again ?'

'Don't talk nonsense, child,' cried Mrs. Marsham, looking towards Eveline, who would, she was afraid, from Cora's silly chatting, penetrate their ambitious designs upon the hand and heart of Mr. Stoke Newington.

'Governesses are dangerous things,' exclaimed Eveline ; ' I would never allow her out of the schoolroom if I had one. They are dangerous because they excite sympathy.'

'It was very foolish, but our governess was in the drawing-room, reading to mamma, the first time Mr. Newington came,' observed Cora, who would reveal everything, 'and he has asked a dozen times after her if he has once.'

'I must see this wonderful governess,' exclaimed Eveline ; 'decidedly I cannot go without giving my opinion of her. What is she like ?'

'Hair like tow and a face like putty,' replied Mabel Marsham, who evidently entertained no goodwill for the unfortunate girl whose only fault was being suspected of having attracted the favourable notice of a rich man, who might make a husband for the eldest Marsham girl.

'Is that all you can say against her ?' asked Eveline. 'If I wanted to run any one down I would not let her off so easily. What's the matter with her figure — isn't there something wrong there ?'

'Her waist is like a wasp's—I am sure she must lace herself to death almost ; when she gets angry with the children her eyes go green, and I'm positive she has one foot bigger than the other, though Cora won't have it.'

'Can she wear your boots, dear, or are they too big for her ?'

'Yes, much,' replied Mabel incautiously.

'Then I should say she had a pretty foot,' answered Eveline, laughing mischievously, adding, 'Cora, dear child, it's absolutely necessary for my peace of mind that I should immediately, if not sooner, be introduced to this paragon of instructeresses. By all means let me see your governess.'

'Come upstairs, then,' replied Cora.

'What absurdity is this ?' exclaimed Mrs. Marsham.

'My dear Mrs. Marsham, ever since you have known me you must admit that I have had my own way, and I am getting too hardened and self-willed to leave off now, so you must humour me, to avoid serious results,' said Eveline.

Mrs. Marsham smiled, and Eveline followed Cora from the room.

'What spirits that girl has,' Mrs. Marsham observed.

'I call it unlimited impudence,' replied Mabel.

'Perhaps you are right, my dear. It may be a distinction without a difference,' returned the mother.

When the two girls reached the schoolroom, Cora paused with her hand on the door and said—

'Don't say anything rude, Evie, dear; although she is only a governess, I like her; she is very nice when you know her. Mabel is jealous because Mr. Newington noticed her, and I think he will look more after you than either of them; you always make the men run after you.'

'No impertinent allusions, if you please, Miss Cora,' said Eveline, 'or I shall have to pinch you till you squeal.'

'Oh, don't do that, pray!' exclaimed Cora, throwing open the door of the schoolroom.

Seated at a table was a young lady becomingly dressed in black silk. Her face had a worn and weary expression. Two girls were trying to learn the rudiments of French, but as they had no aptitude whatever for acquiring languages, they gave their governess immense trouble and did themselves no good.

Cora Marsham was about to make some apology for introducing a stranger to the schoolroom, when, to her amazement, the governess rose hastily from her chair, ran precipitately to Miss St. Pierre, throwing herself in her arms and kissing her on each cheek.

'Ada!'

'Eveline!'

Thus it was that the two friends met again when they least expected it.

'So you know one another—how odd!' said Cora.

'I should think we did, too,' replied Eveline; 'why, this is my pet, my lost child, my dear Ada, and she is worth more than the whole bunch of you put together. I should like to see any one of you dare to say anything unpleasant to her. Look, she is crying!'

Ada Mapleson let her head fall on Eveline's shoulder and wept, but her tears were tears of joy.

'You little stupid,' continued Eveline, 'you have been in town a fortnight, grinding away here and never once thought of me.'

‘I was always thinking of you, but they told me I should go to per—per—perdition if—if I saw you,’ replied Ada, sobbing out the dreadful word.

‘Did they? Perhaps they will have the kindness to hold their tongues about me, or I shall have to make them. Fancy you being here all this time, teaching the young idea, which does not seem grateful for the condescension. Put on your bonnet and come for a drive in the park with mama and me, and home to dinner afterwards. No more of this slavery. Come along, never mind the pupils. I’ll put it all right with Mrs. Marsham.’

Looking up, and smiling through her tears, Ada replied—

‘But my engagement?’

‘Bother that! You come with me, or I’ll know the reason why. Look at your face—pale as death, when you used to be red as a rose. You are killing yourself by inches. This sort of thing can’t be allowed.’

‘I’m sure mama won’t mind you going for a drive, Miss Mapleson,’ exclaimed Cora.

‘It will be all the same if she does,’ rejoined Eveline.

Ada made another faint remonstrance, but was overruled and went to put on her bonnet and shawl; the pupils, as Eveline had elegantly called the children stared in wonderment; but coming to the conclusion that the fates had kindly sent them an unexpected half-holiday, they proceeded to take advantage of the fact to put dolls and other juvenile toys into requisition. A dispute speedily arose as to the possession of a portion of a doll’s underclothes, and a free fight ensued, which Cora in vain tried to quell. Eveline would not go without Ada, and the two descended the stairs, leaving the combatants desperately endeavouring to bite their elder sister about the arms, which showed that efforts at peace-making were not appreciated at their true value by the rising generation.

Mrs. Marsham and Mabel were greatly astonished when they beheld Ada dressed to go out, and the former exclaimed—

‘What is the meaning of this, Miss Mapleson?’

‘It means,’ answered Eveline, promptly coming to the rescue, ‘that I have found a very old friend, who is also my cousin, and that I mean to deliver her out of the house of bondage; you need not look at her as if she had been spoiling the Egyptians before making a start. All she has

on is her own, I assure you, though she has told me confidentially she means to run away with Mr. Stoke Newington if the proposed settlement proves satisfactory to the family. Come along, Ada. Good bye, Mrs. Marsham. Ta, ta, Mabel dear. *Au revoir.*'

Taking Ada by the arm, the giddy girl hurried her out of the room, had her down the stairs and in the carriage before the Marshams could recover from their surprise. Leaning back on the luxurious cushions Eveline said to the footman 'Home,' and turning to Ada, added—

'Now dear, tell me all your adventures, and believe that the good time, which the song told you was coming, has actually arrived.'

'I was so miserable at home,' said Ada, 'after you went, nothing seemed so nice as it had done before. They were all narrow-minded, and I found I could know no peace until I got away. I panted for independence.'

'And when you got it you did not like it. I could see that by your face. But it is a mistake to call going out as a governess independence. You get emancipated from home restraint it is true. Yet it is out of the frying-pan into the fire.'

'What else can I do?' asked Ada dismally.

'Stop with us till you marry Mr. Stoke Newington, which you will do in less than three months if you will consent to be placed under my able tuition. It is odd I can marry every one but myself. Leave it to little Lady Wareham and me, we will arrange it to your satisfaction. Newington is fabulously rich—a new man it is true—but he has taken a fancy to you, and as you have no particular family of your own to boast of, you may as well have him.'

'How you run on,' replied Ada, blushing. 'But, without joking, dear, I don't see how I can be a burden to you all the time.'

'I tell you everything will be settled in less than three months,' rejoined Eveline, 'and as I want a companion sadly the obligation will be mutual, if anything I shall be indebted to you.'

'What about mamma? will she not want papa to fetch me away?'

'Assert your independence. I will hide you away somewhere. I daresay we can stand a siege.'

So by the time the girls reached Eaton Square it was settled that Ada should stay there, and when Eveline made up her mind to a thing it was as good as done.

They chatted agreeably together during the drive, and Ada told her friend all the news. Mr. Allison Mowbray had gone to town. Ernest Lacy had gone up to Oxford after writing some despairing letters to his lady-love, which were returned unopened. Miss Peters was engaged to one of her father's clerks. Edith had concluded a formal engagement, also, with Percy Kendal, and Arthur Monteagle had passed and left Underwood's.

Here were changes in a short space of time !

CHAPTER XVI.

‘ TWENTY THOUSAND A-YEAR.’

Mrs. MARSHAM was highly offended at Eveline St. Pierre's conduct, and had Ada Mapleson been desirous of returning to her situation she would have been unable to do so, for in the course of the afternoon a letter arrived from Mrs. Marsham, who said that she trusted Miss Mapleson would find a home with Mrs. St. Pierre, as she could not think of allowing her to enter her house again after the rude, unceremonious, and wholly incomprehensible way she behaved that day. Eveline laughed, and, crumpling it up, threw the note into the grate.

Mrs. St. Pierre made no objection to Ada staying with them, and wrote to tell her mother of the proposed arrangement, telling her that she would be responsible for the girl's introduction into fashionable London society, and that she trusted a brilliant future was before her; to which Mrs. Mapleson wrote back that Ada's conduct perplexed her parents terribly. They knew not how to act, and begged her sister, for pity's sake, to look carefully after her niece, and saying, ‘in your hands I leave her for a time, perhaps she will come to her senses soon, and may God reward you as you treat my poor misguided girl.’

Ada soon recovered her spirits in Eveline's society; with her who could be dull? They went to balls and parties together, and she had her revenge on the Marshams, who cut her at a horticultural fête, and spoke of her openly as ‘our governess.’

‘We shall meet Stoke Newington at Sir Harry and Lady Rosenthals,’ said Eveline; ‘I have private information about his being there. I will be civil to him, which will make him delighted. He shall dance with you, Ada, to the utter confusion of the Marshams, whom he shall merely bow to.’

Everything took place precisely as Eveline had predicted, and the Marshams finding they were out-generalled sued for peace, and made overtures, which were rudely repulsed. With

regard to Mr. Stoke Newington, Eveline gave her friend these instructions—‘Don’t rush at him as some fools of women do at men ; play him gently ; don’t be over anxious or seem to want him.’ This was valuable advice, and Ada laid it to heart.

Lord D’Estanger did not lose an opportunity of meeting Eveline, and appeared to like her more every time he saw her. She put on her best behaviour when in his society, and every one said it would be a match, but as yet he had not proposed.

The St. Pierre’s gave a ball and he was invited.

Eveline had resolved to bring him to the point without any further delay, and on this occasion she had never looked more fascinating. She was really a splendid woman, well proportioned, with fine limbs and a free unembarrassed manner, which gave her a commanding appearance ; her taste in dress was perfect. She was not silly enough to think that because she was handsome she could afford to dispense with the additional attraction of dress. ‘When unadorned adorned the most’ is pretty on paper, and may do very well for an Arcadian state of society, but in these days something more showy is required than a slip of muslin and your back hair hanging down behind uncombed.

Lord D’Estanger, as a matter of course, did not dance. He was too old for that, not to say infirm, and he was by far too sensible a man to dream of making himself ridiculous by trying to look younger than he was and affecting the amusements of youth. When he entered the spacious ball-room at the St Pierre’s he looked round for Eveline, and was gratified to see that she at once distinguished him and hastened to his side. He offered her his arm, and they wended their way through the gay and giddy crowd of the titled, the witty, and the great, until they reached a comparatively secluded part of the room.

Sitting down, Lord D’Estanger exclaimed, ‘My dear Eveline, I am going to ask you to make a great sacrifice for me this evening.’

‘You have but to name it,’ she answered, ‘and I will give it my serious consideration. I cannot promise that I will comply with your request before I know what it is, as I have always been told not to make rash promises.’

‘I want you, my dear girl,’ he continued, ‘to forego the pleasure of dancing to night and devote the evening to me. Is

this a very great trial ?' he added, as he saw a frown cross her expressive countenance.

'It is our ball, you see,' she answered ; 'all the men I know are here and they will give me no peace ; my card is nearly full already. It will look so odd.'

'Cannot you do as you like in your own house ?'

'No ; that is exactly why I am not my own mistress.'

'What is the etiquette.'

'For men always to ask the daughter of the house. There will be a hue and cry directly I am missed.'

'Well ! I suppose I must not be too exacting,' said Lord D'Estanger with a sigh. 'But you will, I hope, stop long enough here with me to give me an opportunity of saying that which is in my mind, and which I have fully determined to give utterance to this night.'

'What do you mean ?' said Eveline looking down, affecting not to understand him, and toying restlessly with some rare flowers some one had presented her with.

'I shall surprise you, I have no doubt, by my—my presumption, for I can give it no other name,' Lord D'Estanger went on. 'For it is presumptive in a man of my age to aspire to the hand of a girl like you, but I have had serious thoughts of marrying for some time past, and have been eagerly seeking both at home and abroad for one to whom I could give my whole heart, and in whose hands I can safely place the remaining happiness of my life. The solid and substantial attractions of life I can give you. A coronet is highly esteemed by most ladies ; a fortune is one of those things which will at all events procure dresses, jewels, and gauds such as delight the feminine mind. To you I will give a coronet, and upon you I will settle a fourth of my income, which will be five thousand a-year. Miss St. Pierre, Eveline, as you have kindly permitted me to call you, I offer you my hand ; my heart you have long had in your possession. Will you accept me ? You do not know how I long for your answer, or how much depends upon it.'

Eveline had not expected this so soon. It was rather abrupt and she scarcely knew how to reply. It was a magnificent offer. In fact it was a chance that would not occur again in all probability in a lifetime. It was the opportunity which occurs but once. Neglect it and it vanishes like a dream. The tide was at the flood and if taken it would lead

on to fortune. It was time to throw aside all her girlish fancies; all the lovers she had ever had came before her and passed in array during the brief space she sat by Lord D'Estanger's side, and hesitated as to the nature of the answer she should give him.

It was strange that the man who assumed a most prominent position in her mind's eye at that moment was no other than Allison Mowbray. Why she knew not, but she felt intuitively at that time that Mr. Mowbray—strange, erratic, incomprehensible and mysterious creature that he was—was in some way inextricably mixed up with her future career. He had not at Silver Pines and Lowersham inspired her with a feeling of love, though she had always been pleased with his society. That she had attracted him she did not doubt, for he had let her know in a hundred various ways that he was not indifferent to her. During his return to London she had thought of him occasionally, but more as a dear friend whose absence we regret than anything else. Now he took a prominent part in her vision, he seemed to be close to her, and to extend his hand warningly as if he were forbidding her to pledge herself to her aged lover.

Dismissing this unpleasant phantom with an effort of the will, and finding fault with her distempered imagination, Eveline made an endeavour to calmly reply to her ardent suitor.

'I appreciate your offer, Lord D'Estanger, at its true value,' she said, 'and if I consent to affiancé myself to you, it must be subject to the approval of my parents, without whose consent I never take any important step.'

'Certainly, my dear, I cannot applaud such a resolution too highly,' exclaimed Lord D'Estanger quickly, being entirely deceived by Eveline's hypocrisy.

'What a delicious idea!' she added to herself; 'would not any one who knew me well laugh if I told them that I never acted without mama's sanction.'

She had so often heard her father say that the world was a stage, and the men and women in it merely players, that she thought it quite justifiable to play a theatrical part. In this instance it was especially so. There was nothing repulsive to her in the fact, that she was making a fool of a poor fond old man, and leading him on to the consummation of an act of egregious folly which could only result in utter and complete misery.

'All is fair in love and war' is a common saying, but like very many common sayings it is dismally false. Why a man or a woman, when in love, should behave badly and act in a manner that they would scorn at any other time passes our comprehension.

'Am I to understand, my dear,' continued Lord D'Estanger, 'that you accept my addresses, contingently and subject to your friends' approval?'

'I do, Lord D'Estanger, but I fear that I shall not make you a good wife; I am too gay and giddy.' This may appear candour, but in reality it was the art of the consummate actor.

'Not for a moment, my darling; it will be my pleasure to mould you to my will. The faults of youth I shall be able to correct, though you need not fear that you will find me a severe disciplinarian. I shall yield to you unhesitatingly in all good things; in things bad my superior judgment and experience must weigh with you. Does the project dismay you, my pretty one?'

'Not in the least. If you are too tyrannical I shall try and muster up a little courage to take my own part,' answered Eveline.

'And should I blame you?' exclaimed his lordship; 'by no means. I like a woman of spirit, and I should not love you so very dearly as I do if I thought you were tame and spiritless.'

'Thank goodness you will not be able to accuse me of that. I could never be that unless I were badly treated and crushed into the dust.'

'I hope and trust most sincerely that we shall live a happy life. We are engaged now you know, dearest Eveline. I may talk to you fondly and lay bare my soul and the innermost recesses of my heart. Oh! my darling, my darling, my pet lamb!' cried Lord D'Estanger, carried away by a transport of love and a perfect tempest of affectionate yearning. 'I feel that I have not lived in vain. This is the happiest day of my life. I am wildly, deliriously happy—you have accepted me, and I fear no obstacle to our union. You have consented to be mine. Would that I could clasp you in my arms and seal the compact with a kiss.'

'Not now, Adolphus,' said Eveline, adding, as she thought she was scarcely warm enough, 'Not now, Dolly dear. I shall

have to call you Dolly, you know, it is the only diminutive of Adolphus that I can think of.'

'Call me what you like; I have your love and I can rejoice in the sweet treasure of your virgin affection. Oh! dear Eveline, I am transported with joy to think that I have gained such a priceless treasure. I can scarcely believe that it is not a dream. I, past my fiftieth year to gain the hand and the love of the belle of the season—the belle of any season. It seems incredible and yet it is so. Tell me it is so. Let me receive the blessed assurance from your own sweet lips, those lips that I long to kiss.'

Eveline looked at him with a loving smile, and the fascination was complete.

'But we must talk seriously,' continued the amorous peer. 'You will be entirely devoted to me. I must have all your affection, all your confidence. I cannot even allow you a female friend. I must be the repository of all your little troubles and your secrets.'

'Not even Lady Wareham?'

'Oh, that is another thing. Lady Wareham is a discreet companion. She is a sensible woman. Far be it from me to deny you the intellectual companionship for which I see your highly cultivated mind longs.'

'I see what you mean, Adolphus dear,' continued Eveline; 'you think that most girls are weak and silly, and it would only do me harm to know them.'

'That's it exactly; that's my dread. You will yield to me in this?'

'With pleasure.'

'Then it is settled that I am to be your friend, philosopher, and guide?'

'It is settled.'

'My angel, I could kiss the hem of your garment!' cried Lord D'Estanger.

'Oh, no, you shall kiss something more agreeable than that before you go to-night, if you are good,' said Eveline playfully. 'After supper we will stroll in the conservatory, and in the shade of the orange trees.'

She paused and smiled once more, with increased wickedness. Lord D'Estanger pressed her hand and gazed in her lovely face with silent rapture.

'There are some men coming this way and they look at you,' exclaimed Lord D'Estanger, presently.

Eveline looked in the direction his glance indicated, and beheld Captain Algernon Seyton, the man she had so often spoken to Ada about.

His companion turned his face on one side, and for the moment she did not see it.

'It is Captain Seyton,' exclaimed Eveline, 'a very old friend. I have promised to dance with him.'

'You have promised?'

'Yes.'

'In that case your promise must be kept, but I could have wished it otherwise,' said his lordship. 'You are mine now, Eveline, and I cannot bear the thought of any one but myself putting his arms round you. This indecent—for so it appears to me—custom of dancing is more offensive to me to-night than it has ever been before.'

'You forget, dear,' replied Eveline, 'that my promise to Captain Seyton was given before you came, and before you said what has just made me so happy. I must run away with him now, but will soon return. Shall you be here? I must attend to my father's guests, you know.'

'Of course,' said Lord D'Estanger, with a sigh which nearly resembled a groan.

'Very well. Back again presently, you dear good old fidget.'

'I shall be on thorns. No peace, Eveline, till you return.'

'The old goose!' was Eveline's mental remark, as she tripped away to meet Algernon Seyton.

When she was out of hearing she held out both her hands to the gay and gallant captain, crying—

'Algy, dear old boy, where have you been—why didn't you come before? you might have saved me from a martyrdom.'

'What martyrdom? Has old D'Estanger been doing the sweet pathetic?' asked the captain.

'Very much sweet pathetic, but——'

She turned very pale, and almost staggered from a sudden weakness. The gentleman with Captain Seyton was—who do you think?—Mr. Allison Mowbray, looking very well, very nicely dressed, more fascinating than Eveline had ever seen him before.

'Permit me to introduce my friend, Mr. Allison Mowbray,' said Captain Seyton. 'Pardon me for not doing so before, but the warmth of your greeting completely knocked Mowbray out of my mind.'

‘Mr. Mowbray and I know one another perfectly well,’ said Eveline; adding, ‘Have you brought Mr. Dagley with you? I heard he was your shadow.’

Mr. Mowbray looked rather annoyed at this question, and replied—

‘Dagley has turned his gentle mind to agricultural pursuits, and is now my farm bailiff. He lives at Silver Pines, and makes the earth bring forth her increase.’

‘How very interesting! That is one way of keeping him quiet.’

‘Yes,’ answered Mowbray, with an air of unconcern. ‘I thought it the best, and so I adopted it.’

‘Well, Algy, so you’ve been in the Mediterranean, dancing at Gib., and broiling at Malta. I have heard about you. The little club in Pall Mall was quite dull without you, so every one says, and we have had no drags out this year, no Richmond, no Greenwich. Is it not sad? You must put some soul into us. This dormouse state will never do. We shall all be as dull as the Queen and her Court soon. But I forget I’m done for. I’m laid up in lavender. I’m on the shelf!’

‘What on earth do you mean?’ said Captain Seyton.

‘Give me your ear, as dear old Lady Wareham says. D’Estanger’s asked me, and I’ve consented.’

‘I congratulate you,’ said Allison Mowbray, to whom this remark was audible.

‘Poor Evie!’ exclaimed Algernon Seyton, ‘caught at last; well, D’Estanger’s a clever fellow. He’s done what none of us could do.’

‘You are all so poor in the Guards. You have none of you any money. You are luxuries that girls of moderate means cannot dream of.’

‘Filthy lucre is king.’

‘Poor *blasé*, you’d like a little more lucre, wouldn’t you, clean or unclean, as long as it would pass current?’ said Eveline.

Captain Algernon Seyton had long been known about town as young *blasé*, and Eveline frequently called him so.

‘You once told me, Miss St. Pierre, that this was not a mercenary age,’ said Allison Mowbray, in a low tone; ‘will you repeat that, will you tell me so now? What should be said of a girl who sells herself for a coronet and for money?’

'Why, that she has her wits about her, and is anything but a fool,' exclaimed Eveline, biting her lips.

'No. It should be said that she was a heartless hypocrite, without shame or feeling, that she had her price and was knocked down to the highest bidder,' rejoined Allison Mowbray, with marked severity.

'I say, Algy, protect me from this man, he is positively abusing me,' said Eveline appealing to her friend.

'What shall I do to him? have you a window handy, with a waterbutt underneath to break his fall? I promise you he shall go out with a run,' said the captain laughing.

'That's right, let him know that he must not be insolent to the pet of the Guards. Is not that what you used to call me?'

'Do not recall the past. I am not stone—I am not adamant. You want to break my heart. I will not be drawn into the vortex again. Back, tempter—get thee behind me—what is that gentleman's name who is said not to be so black as he is painted?'

'Never mind, you will make acquaintance with him soon enough,' said Eveline laughing; 'and now are we to have this dance that we arranged about. I see a legal contingent coming up this way. There is Mr. Tenterdean, Lady Wareham's friend, and Mr. Lytleton arm-and-arm with Coke. More bar. Give me your arm: Mr. Mowbray, I shall have the extreme felicity of meeting you again presently.'

Captain Seyton and Eveline walked up the room, and met Mr. Tenterdean with his friends. He said he had been in court all day and had saved a fortunate client from a heavy loss, by getting a verdict in the teeth of great odds.

'Will the poor man ever get it? the money I mean. I always thought money litigated about went into the lawyers' pockets,' said Eveline.

'Any deviation from the path of rectitude and virtue,' replied Mr. Harrow Tenterdean, 'is sure to be punished in this world or the next. A Nemesis sits up aloft and——'

'Let it sit there if you please,' cried Eveline as the music struck up; 'we can dispense with its agreeable society until after this valse is over at all events.'

When the dance was over, and Eveline had an opportunity of talking to her partner, she had to put up with a little ridicule for settling down, which was a thing that Captain

Seyton had not deemed possible, nor would he give it full credence until it was an accomplished fact.

‘You had better make the most of me,’ Eveline replied. ‘For it really will happen, and my future lord and master will not allow me to dance; I am to be kept shut up and be quite proper.’

‘I don’t think he is wrong; if I had a wife I should not allow her to run about loose,’ said Captain Seyton.

‘Oh, yes, you would,’ answered Eveline; ‘you are just the sort of easy-going good-natured old spoon who would let a woman do just as she pleased with you.’

‘Words, mere words,’ laughed the captain; ‘assertion is never proof, you know.’

Mr. Allison Mowbray now came up and begged the honour of Miss St. Pierre’s hand for the next dance.

She looked dubiously at her card and extending her hands exclaimed—

‘I am doubtful of it; look, I am engaged that deep.’

‘Cannot you slip me in for a square dance?’ he said persuasively.

Such was the effect of this man’s manner upon her that she consented, though her better judgment advised her that having once escaped from his dangerous influence she would act wisely in steering clear of him for the future. When she remembered that he had saved her life at the risk of his she could not refuse him. If this did not give him a claim on her kind indulgence what would?

‘I suppose I must submit,’ she said; ‘what a worry you men are!’

‘I hope you will not find me so,’ he said.

‘I leave you in good hands, Miss St. Pierre,’ observed Captain Seyton, as he walked away.

‘So,’ cried Mr. Allison Mowbray, as they walked round the room until the music commenced, ‘you are going to become another’s?’

‘Is there anything very dreadful in the prospect?’ inquired Eveline.

‘To me, yes.’

‘And why to you?’ Eveline demanded, flushing in spite of herself, she knew not why.

‘Because it kills all hope for ever. Once I had dreamed that—that you might be mine, and it is not pleasant to awake

suddenly and find that you have been cherishing a phantom. I tell you this, and tell it you abruptly, because I cannot play the part of a sentimental fool, and sigh and groan. My passion is too deep for words, yet it gives me some slight relief to pour out the tale of my woes and my suffering before you. Yes, Eveline, when we first met, I felt that our fates were united. Ours was not an idle meeting. Fate brought us together because it had been decided that we should be man and wife.'

'Are you mad, Mr. Mowbray?' cried Eveline, shuddering at the vehemence with which he spoke, and feeling awed by the strange light which burned in his eyes.

"I am not. What I say may seem to you the utterances of a madman, but I am a stern fatalist, and know that I am speaking truth.'

'Absurd,' she said. 'Have I not told you that I am solemnly engaged to another? This very night I have made an agreement, which will result in my becoming Lady D'Estanger.'

'Never. It is useless to fight against fate, you will never become Lord D'Estanger's wife,' answered Mr. Mowbray with the same startling vehemence.

'Really, sir,' said Eveline, 'this passes all bounds. You saved my life and we were on friendly terms in the country, but neither of those circumstances will justify your language to me this evening. I am not in the habit of being talked to in this way and I will not put up with it.'

'For a time you will.'

Eveline, endeavoured to withdraw her hand from his arm, but with some force he held her tightly and prevented her doing so, occasioning her such pain that she winced again.

'This is most ungentlemanly, unpardonable. I will expose you, sir,' said Eveline, almost crying with rage.

'In that case you make a scene which will be most unpleasant to both of us, but more especially so to you; what will people think? I beg you for your own sake to be calm. It is decided by fate that I should speak to you to-night, and speak I will, come what may—speak I must, at whatever cost. I shall go mad if I do not say what my breaking heart will not permit me to keep secret any longer. Listen, Eveline, I love you. Laugh at me, call this a confession of weakness if you will, but, for heaven's sake, believe me when I say I

love you, with all my soul, all my force, all the vital energy of my being, with all the terrible strength of a man who has all his life laughed at love, and held the tender passion up to scorn ; you cannot hear this admission without pitying me !’

‘ Why should I pity you when you say that it is decreed by fate that I should marry you ? In that case you have nothing to dread, nothing whatever. I am surprised, Mr. Mowbray, that a man of your intelligence and culture should resort to such a charlatan trick as this to impress me. It is rather the way to woo an ignorant servant girl, and does not flatter me at all, I can tell you. The whole thing is unworthy of you. I have only listened to your silly nonsense because you have, in the most cowardly manner, compelled me to do so, but I shall not omit to mark my sense of displeasure at your conduct by cutting you dead whenever and wherever I may meet you !’

‘ Possibly,’ returned Allison Mowbray, who was calm again. ‘ Such is the natural prompting of an excitable and wayward woman. Pass me by in the street if you will, and ignore my respectful salutation whenever we may meet ; your eyes may avoid me, but will your heart do so ? I venture to say no. Your heart will throb for me with increased violence. I am no empiric, no quack. What I say will as surely come to pass as that the moon and stars will rise as usual this night.’

Without Eveline’s perceiving it, Mr. Mowbray had caused her to approach that part of the room in which Lord D’Estanger was still sitting. He had told Eveline that he should remain there until she returned to him, and in the most minute particular he was a man of his word.

Lord D’Estanger could not fail to notice the animated conversation which was taking place between them. Their agitation, mutual indeed, was marked. It was all the more noticeable, too, because the music had commenced, and the dancers had taken their positions. Eveline had made, as an excuse for running away from his lordship, the statement that she must attend to her father’s guests, and was engaged to dance with several gentlemen. Was it not odd that she should leave that part of the room appropriated to the exigences of the dancers, and walk about hanging on the arm of a man who was talking to her with a degree of freedom which, to speak mildly, we will say is not accorded to a stranger. So odd, indeed, did Lord D’Estanger think it that he became uneasy.

It seemed to him that she had met an old admirer to whom she was in some sort pledged, and had felt constrained to inform him of her engagement just entered into with another. He, in his turn, justly incensed, was upbraiding her with her unjustifiable and cruel behaviour, and at the same time imploring her to take pity upon him and cancel her promise.

This was the only interpretation Lord D'Estanger could put upon what he saw, and it disquieted him sadly. He had laid bare his heart of hearts, as he had said, to Eveline, and it was distressing in the extreme to think that she would come to him with a love which was not all genuine and true, but which had been tampered with on one if not more occasions.

'Will you tell me that you have never once thought of me with a tender emotion?' asked Mr. Mowbray. 'Answer me that question, and I will not inflict my presence on you any longer. You are a woman to whom I am sure a falsehood is odious. Tell me I am wrong, and I will leave fate to work out the problem of our destiny.'

'I do not know what you mean,' faltered Eveline, who felt herself succumbing before the intensity of this man.

'Let me explain,' he promptly replied. 'I do not mean to say that you have ever thought of me as a husband, but you have, I am sure, looked upon me as a very near and dear friend, whom it would be one of the serious miseries of life to lose.'

'I admit that willingly.'

'You do? then I am content, for it is the dawn of love.'

Without one word further he released her arm, and with a proud step, after making her a bow, walked away. His manner was triumphant, his air that of a man who had conquered; while Eveline stood still, resembling a statue—stony, despairing, wonder-stricken. She could not realize the meaning of the strange scene she had just gone through. Mr. Mowbray's manner had been more that of a madman than that of a rational being. It was so totally different to anything that she had experienced before that she was astounded and could not recover herself.

All this while she was standing gazing on the floor vacant, abstracted, doubting, fearing, Lord D'Estanger never once took his eyes from her.

Suddenly she recollected herself and looked round her, timidly dreading lest she had been observed. She saw Lord

D'Estanger and her colour heightened. Had she been so near him without knowing it. If so, the next question was, how much had he seen of the singular exhibition Mr. Allison Mowbray had made of her and himself. What would he think of her—what conclusion had he come to in his own mind? She must talk to and soothe him before he began to entertain suspicions. Vexed with the whole occurrence, with herself, with Mowbray, she had difficulty in keeping down her rising anger.

She was by Lord D'Estanger's side in an instant and timidly looked in his face, which was very grave. Grasping the difficulty at once, she exclaimed, 'How stern you look, Adolphus dear? Have I been away too long—are you displeased with me?'

'Who's that man, Eveline?' he asked.

'Which one?'

'The one with whom you were talking only just now, tall, dark, handsome.'

'Mr. Allison Mowbray—why do you ask?' replied Eveline, trying to look unconcerned.

'I have a motive in doing so. Where did you meet him and make his acquaintance? Do not fret. Do not be impatient at my catechism. It's necessary for my peace of mind that I should put these questions to you; I am far too candid and straightforward to let any doubt slumber in my breast, I encourage no *arrieres pensees*. If I have one, out it must come.'

'Oh!' exclaimed Eveline, with a forced laugh, 'you must not be jealous of poor Mowbray. I own he is a devoted admirer of mine, so are dozens of men I could point out to you, yet they are nothing to me. I do not care a straw for all of them put together.'

'You have not yet answered my question,' persisted his lordship.

'Where did I meet him? It was in the country. I went to stay with some cousins of mine in Derbyshire. He lives at a place called Silver Pines.'

'He is nothing to you? You give me your word?'

'Nothing whatever.'

'And never has been?'

'No, and never will be—that's more. Are you satisfied?' said Eveline, with a newly-found vigour.

‘I am. My dearest one, forgive me. This question was prompted by my devoted love for you!’ replied Lord D’Estanger, taking her hand in his, and pressing it between his own.

This difficulty was bridged over, but Eveline saw that there would be great danger in any future interview with Allison Mowbray. He was dangerous, and she must do her best to avoid him, at least when Lord D’Estanger was in the immediate vicinity, or even likely to hear of her being seen with him.

CHAPTER XVII.

‘THE WATER PARTY.’

WHILE Eveline St. Pierre's affair of the heart was progressing with Lord D'Estanger, Ada Mapleson was making some way with the rich *parvenu*, Stoke Newington. The latter appreciated her society more than ever, and proved that he had formed a sincere attachment for her. Ada did not dislike him, though he was not exactly to her taste: she would have preferred one of the ‘hard-up darlings’ as Eveline called the Guardsmen. There was more style about them, and they were nicer in their manner to ladies than was Mr. Newington, who was too much inclined to think that he could carry all before him with a high hand, and that money was everything. This is a mistake for any man to make, especially with girls; few of them are naturally mercenary. If they become so it is principally owing to the teaching of their friends, and they are very prone to lend a willing ear to the promptings of the heart, which they refuse to listen to prudential considerations.

Eveline had promised Ada that she would make Mr. Newington marry her. ‘If he does not propose of his own accord I will chaff him into it,’ she said, and she was quite capable of keeping her word in this respect. As a matter of predilection Ada would rather have remained single than otherwise. But like thousands of other girls, she looked forward to marriage as the great means of emancipation from home constraint and the trammels which always encircle maidenhood. It would bring her liberty, she could do as she liked comparatively. If her husband were rich so much the better, it would relieve her from the worry and the anxiety which a want of money entails upon those who have the misfortune to be poor.

Though Mr. and Mrs. Mapleson consented under a kind of protest to Ada remaining with Mr. and Mrs. St. Pierre, they did not consider themselves under any obligation to contribute one halfpenny towards her support. She had no pocket-

money but what Eveline lent her, and if she had a new ball dress or a fresh walking costume it was to her cousin's generosity that she was indebted for the novelty.

Eveline never for a moment by word or deed led her to feel the dependent position she occupied. She was kindness itself, and treated her on all occasions as if she had been her sister, but this did not prevent Ada from wincing when she thought how much she owed to Eveline and her friends. She wished more than ever for a settlement, and rushed eagerly at such a chance as Stoke Newington, though she did not feel a particle of love for him.

Here began the hypocrisy which a girl, situated as she was, must encourage, if she wished to succeed in the world. She met men repeatedly whom she could have loved with all the wealth of her affection, but they, having attractions elsewhere, neglected her charms, perhaps because she was poor, and passed her by as one ignores a pretty flower by the roadside, simply because there are so many like it.

Having no money was a serious drawback for Ada, and she was obliged to stifle her feelings, and like all the others around her play a part, wear her mask gaily, and persuade herself that she was doing right in encouraging Mr. Newington, and persuading him that she was flattered by his attentions, and that she really loved him. Perhaps love was blind as usual, and her did not notice the coldness of her exterior, or she played her part more perfectly than ever she gave herself credit for. Certain it is that everything indicated an approaching declaration.

Mr. and Mrs. St. Pierre applauded Eveline's determination to marry Lord D'Estanger very highly. The alliance was in every respect most satisfactory. Mr. St. Pierre said that he had never for an instant doubted his daughter's intelligence. It is true that she was a little inclined to run wild, but what of that? it only showed how mettlesome and full of spirit she was. He could not blame her, it was not a fault. If it were she had amply redeemed it by the brilliant alliance she was about to form, which placed her *per saltum* at the very tip-top of fashionable London society, and directly diminished the burden which lay upon her father's income. Oh, yes, Evie was a girl in a thousand. She knew how to play her cards, and he would not hear a word said against her.

Husband and wife, that is to say, father and mother, were

perfectly in accord on this subject, and both agreed that Eveline deserved the highest praise for the masterly manner in which she had played the matrimonial game. Neither bestowed a thought on their child's future happiness, that was too trumpery a thing to be weighed in the balance with a coronet and twenty thousand a-year—a fig for happiness in such a case! If a coronet and twenty thousand a-year could not bring happiness these worldly-minded people thought that happiness was better out of the question. They did not care whether or not their daughter went into the house of God, and, standing before the altar, lied to her Maker. This was a secondary consideration with them. If she did not love D'Estanger, she must say so, because the forms of the church required a declaration to that effect before the sacred rites could be solemnized. It was a venial fiction, and as such must be lightly passed over by people of the world. Was it not a thing which is done every day in the week and year? Of course it was. Where then was the harm?

Lady Wareham rejoiced exceedingly when she heard how rapidly matters had arrived at maturity, and took no small share of the glory to herself. She kept what she called a match book. In this she put down the date, names, &c., and full particulars in fact of every match which had commenced or ended under her auspices. In the match book she entered Lord D'Estanger's name, and coupled it with that of Eveline St. Pierre. Ada's affair was not yet sufficiently developed to deserve this honour, but a blank page was looked out for it and no doubt existed in her ladyship's active mind that it would be placed there in due season.

Mr. Stoke Newington, acting upon the suggestions repeatedly thrown out by many young ladies with whom he was acquainted, sent out invitations, through Lady Wareham's instrumentality, for a water party. Lady Wareham was to have the management of the invitations. If she objected to any one, the objection was to be held fatal, and the name placed in the black list, that index of the expurgated which was an indelible bar to an advent into the realms of bliss, which are bounded on the south by Belgravia, on the west by Kensington, the north by Bayswater, and the east by May-fair.

A large and handsome barge was engaged, which was used by the city magnates when they engaged in that delect-

able pursuit known as swan hopping, which takes place every year. Coote and Turney's band was held in requisition. The covered deck of the barge, beneath which was the spacious refreshment saloon, afforded an admirable opportunity for dancing on the return home. The barge was to be drawn by two horses, all the beauties of the water and the scenery would be enjoyed in quick succession, without the necessity for any of the party to have recourse to manual labour. There would be no danger, and it was expected that all would go merry as a marriage bell.

The rendezvous was Teddington. The 'Swan,' which was the name of the barge, was moored just below the lock, so that the start could be effected without any trouble, and it was intended to start at eleven, and go up as far as Weybridge weir.

Here the important operation of dining could be gone through, and the party would have a chance of landing and taking a stroll before the return home was attempted. The programme of this delightful trip fascinated everybody who heard of it, and invitations were literally begged for, but Lady Wareham was inexorable as fate. She had discovered that the 'Swan' would not comfortably hold more than seventy, and to that number she limited her letters. An equal number of ladies and gentlemen was asked so that there should not be a preponderance of the weaker sex, which would be sure to produce heart burnings and jealousy.

The hour for the start was twelve, and at that time nearly every one was present, some having driven down, some came by train, a few in hansoms; one or two young muscular Christians of the Kingsley school, fresh from the universities, and having upon them the fame of a walking tour through the *pas de Calais* last year, came down on foot. These, it was popularly supposed, would have gladly taken the post of the horses which drew the barge, and have towed it along bravely.

Lord D'Estanger had driven to Teddington in the St. Pierre's carriage, Mrs. St. Pierre accompanying Eveline and Ada. The old Lord was never in better spirits. It was a lovely day in June; a brilliant summer had succeeded an early spring, and the country was rich in flowers and luxuriant vegetation.

Eveline was afraid that Allison Mowbray, who was a friend of Mr. Stoke Newington, would be invited; and it was with

considerable pleasure that she found he was not on board the 'Swan' when she arrived.

Nor did he make his appearance at the time of starting. His audacity was unbounded, and there was no possibility of prophesying to what lengths his impudence and assurance would carry him. Lady Wareham was, as usual on gay and festive occasions, in her element. Mr. Newington was affable and more tolerable than was his wont, but without the able assistance and the countenance of her ladyship he would have been at a loss, for he had not that easy well-bred grace, and that knack of putting people at their ease which she had.

As the barge was nearing Kingston, and the horses had to go over the bridge to get to the towing path, which there changes sides, Lady Wareham approached Lord D'Estanger and Eveline, saying—

'Mabel Marsham was looking for you. She thought you were downstairs, but you are such a sad fly-away that I would not answer for you.'

'Here comes Miss Marsham,' said Eveline.

'Oh, my dear Eveline, I have such trouble to find you. There is such a crowd, and downstairs everybody is drinking bitter beer drawn from a large barrel.'

'A very good thing, too, when you are thirsty,' replied Eveline.

'I don't see the gentleman you were asking Lady Wareham so earnestly about,' continued Miss Marsham, who having overheard a conversation which took place between Lady Wareham and Eveline, thought she would make what mischief she could out of it in revenge for the Stoke Newington affair with Ada.

Lord D'Estanger turned an interrogative glance upon Eveline, who could not, much to her annoyance, prevent the tell tale blood from rushing to her face.

'Who is that,' he inquired, 'if I may venture to make the inquiry?'

'Oh! no one you know, at least I think not, Lord D'Estanger,' replied Mabel, in a perfectly artless manner. 'His name is Allison Mowbray, he is a friend of Mr. Newington's and knew you in the country, did he not, Evie dear?'

'Were you talking about him to Lady Wareham?' asked Lord D'Estanger, fixing his eyes upon Eveline reproachfully.

'I mentioned his name when we were talking about the guests,' answered Eveline.

'Oh! I can quite understand that,' said Miss Marsham. 'From what I can understand, the connection between dear Eveline and himself was quite romantic. They went out skating and she fell in, and he very nobly saved her life at the risk of his own.'

'Saved her life?' echoed Lord D'Estanger, with a sort of gasp.

'Yes, indeed, did he not, Evie?'

'I wish you would mind your own business and not go repeating absurd stories which you hear by listening at doors, I suppose. That is about your form, and not a bit too low for you,' exclaimed Eveline petulantly.

'Oh! what a temper you are in all at once! I am sure I did not know it was a secret about you and Mr. Mowbray. If I had known it I would not have said a word for the world,' replied Miss Marsham, affecting to be sorry, which made the matter infinitely worse.

'It is a matter of the most perfect indifference to me,' said Eveline, trying to look unconcerned.

'We heard it all from Mrs. Mapleson, Ada's mama, you know,' continued Miss Marsham. 'When she went away with you in the extraordinary way she did, my mama wrote down to Lowersham with a full and complete explanation, and a correspondence has been going on ever since. You did not impress the Maplesons very favourably, Eveline, they do not speak highly of you, and that Birmingham affair reads very funnily. Mama and I laughed over it, till we positively cried. It was so like you. If I can get hold of Mr. Mowbray, I must ask him to tell me all about it and those boys at Underwood's, the cadets I mean! you managed to enjoy yourself in Derbyshire at all events.'

Lord D'Estanger did not miss a word uttered by the garrulous Miss Marsham, who, in stirring up this little puddle, was only acting in obedience to the instructions given her by her mother, a veteran strategist of no mean order.

'I must run away, dear,' added Miss Marsham; 'so sorry, but ma expects me at the other end of the vessel. We shall meet again soon.'

Lord D'Estanger turned to Eveline, and said—

'Why are you so annoyed at the silly chatter of that idle girl?'

'I annoyed? not the least in the world!' replied Eveline.

'I thought you were. It looked so to me. If this Mr. Mowbray is nothing to you, Eveline, how is it that you make inquiries about him, and the mere mention of his name puts you in a flutter? Did he save your life? Is there any truth in the statement, and what is the meaning of the Birmingham affair? It appears to me that there is much in your life at Lowersham with which I am unacquainted.'

'You are too exacting, Adolphus,' answered Eveline; 'whatever occurred at Lowersham took place before I was acquainted with you, not long before, but any how before our engagement was made. I have already told you that Mr. Mowbray is nothing to me, I did not even indulge in an innocent flirtation with him. If I had done so, I should have had a perfect right, I was the mistress of my own actions, and I do not think it kind of you, or generous at all to try and pry into all my past life.'

'Will it not bear inspection?' asked Lord D'Estanger, with some acerbity.

'Yes, it will,' answered Eveline, with rising anger, 'and I warn you that you will act wisely in not provoking me too far. If I had done anything wrong, or that looked wrong with men since our engagement, you would be justified in saying to me what you now do.'

'I have said nothing, my dear child. All I have done is to ask you a few harmless questions.'

'Not harmless, they annoy me. If you regret your engagement, I will release you from it.'

'No, no,' cried his lordship, much moved. 'Do not speak like that, Eveline; you are heated, you will recall those dreadful words when you are cooler.'

'I don't know. Any one would think that I was some poor ugly wretch of a girl who had no friends, and who could not get a man to look at her.'

'Instead of being the handsomest, the best, and the most attractive darling of the year,' said Lord D'Estanger tenderly, trying to allay the storm he had evoked.

'If you were as rich as Cræsus, and had a dozen coronets, I would not put up with it!' exclaimed Eveline, incautiously.

'Oh! how am I to interpret that remark? Is it for my wealth and rank that you are going to marry me?' said Lord D'Estanger, who thought he was getting a fresh insight into Eveline's character.

'How you twist and turn about everything I say. It is disgusting,' replied Eveline. 'One cannot open one's mouth. I am tired of my life now. God knows what I shall feel when I am completely in your power.'

'Good heaven, Eveline, to hear you speak any one would suppose I was an ogre,' answered his lordship in a tone of remonstrance.

'So you are. I won't put up with your tyranny, and I shall go away till you are in a better temper.'

With these words Eveline walked away to the other end of the vessel, where the musicians were, and listened to a solo, remarkably well played on a flute. There were plenty of men she knew on board, and they hailed her appearance with delight. Their darkness was going to be lightened, they said, now that the sun had come to shine upon them.

'You will have your guardian after you, directly,' exclaimed Captain Seyton. 'I should advise you to be discreet.'

'Be quiet, Algy, I won't be chaffed. I am put out,' replied Eveline.

'By whom? Has the patriarch said anything. Is it Methuselah?' said the captain, adding, 'This floating thing we are in suggests the Ark, and old D'Estanger at the bow is like Noah.'

'And you are one of the beasts he has carefully selected and brought on board. Is that what you want to say? at all events the bipedal element preponderates largely.'

Eveline leaned over the side, and watched the placid stream, and the pleasant water-lilies, and the stately swans, and the big trees, skirting the water, whose foliage was reflected. Hampton Court came in view as they turned the bend near Kingston, and she was soon contemplating the venerable pile. Captain Seyton leant over by her side, and said in a low tone—'Did a disagreeable old man ruffle her pretty feathers? Poor dear little birdie!'

'Don't be a fool, Algy!' replied Eveline.

'There was a time,' he went on, 'when the voice of love had charms, but now——'

'Now I am another's. It is unkind to torment me; you know I am engaged, and whatever D'Estanger may be, I will not have him bullied. He is to be my husband; that fact should be quite sufficient to protect him from your ridicule.'

'I was not making fun of him ; I would not do such a thing, Evie. The old boy is very well in his way. He is a dear old boy. I understand your position, and you have my sympathy, my dear girl.'

'You want to make me cry, and spoil my looks ; you are a perfect brute, Algy !' said Eveline, looking up through a mist.

'Talk of something else then. Here we are at Hampton Court. Look, we shall go under the bridge presently. They are unhooking the horses, and getting the poles out to punt us up to the lock. Who is that standing near the lock-house ? Look through my glass, Evie ; I think I ought to know that man.'

He gave her a little binocular which he always carried, and she took a steady look through it.

Presently her hand shook, and she said—

'It is like my luck, my star doesn't shine to-day.'

'What's like your luck ?' he queried.

'There's just the man of all others I did not want to see ; he persecutes me. I hate him, but D'Estanger gets as jealous as a fiend. It is Allison Mowbray.'

'I thought so. He said he should come, but I suppose missed the Twickenham train and came on to Hampton Court. Clever dodge ! I shouldn't have thought of that.'

'I wish he'd tumble into the lock and make an end of himself. How did you know him ?'

'Met him at a club. He's all right, isn't he ?'

'I don't know I've had my fancies, but I can't prove anything. Perhaps he's all right. He's got money, if that's anything towards it. I've seen his place in the country,' rejoined Eveline.

'Come and bitter !' exclaimed Captain Seyton, 'you are a cup too low, Miss Eveline. I can't allow that, you must be stimulated.'

'It's the heart, Algy.'

'Never knew you had one,' he rejoined with a half-smile.

'Oh ! you unfeeling monster ! I did not think this of you,' said Eveline laughing, as she descended the few steps that led to the cabin, where she had some beer which certainly refreshed her.

The boat was some time getting up to the lock, and Lord D'Estanger did not know Mr. Mowbray was so near, he had been occupying himself by putting questions to mischievous

Miss Mabel Marsham, who had come to his side again directly after Eveline had gone away. Her mama had told her she might 'cut that detestable girl out with old D'Estanger,' and she was trying her best to do it.

When she first came up she pretended to be looking for Eveline.

'Have you seen her, Lord D'Estanger?' she exclaimed. 'I want to apologize and make it up with her. I am so afraid I said something I ought not to have said. You don't know what a foolish little blunderer I am—always making mistakes and losing my best friends.'

'I don't see that you have done anything wrong in the present instance,' said Lord D'Estanger; 'what is there to be thought blameable in your allusion to Lowersham and Miss St. Pierre's goings on there?'

'I thought perhaps she did not want you to know——'

'To know what?'

'Oh, nothing. Girls will be a little misty about their past when they get engaged. Eveline's intimacy with Mr. Mowbray and the Birmingham affair were what I ought not to have mentioned.'

'Pray tell me about the Birmingham affair.'

'May I? Ought I to? Really it does not seem fair; what will you think of me for telling tales out of school?' said Miss Marsham, with a simper.

'Simply that you have rendered me a great service, for which I shall ever be grateful.'

'Really?'

'Upon my word, yes. I am anxious to know all. I shall know little peace unless you gratify my curiosity after the hints you have thrown out. Do please oblige me, my dear young lady, and the handsomest bracelet I can find in Mr. Streeter's shop shall be yours to-morrow.'

'I don't want a bribe. Oh, no. But as you press me so much, I must tell you what mama and I have heard from Mrs. Mapleson, who was the lady with whom Eveline St. Pierre stayed in Derbyshire. Every one knows how she went on with Mr. Mowbray.'

'I have never heard of it.'

'No! that is odd, too. When he was ill, she wanted positively to nurse and wait on him night and day. A girl must be very far gone to do that, you know; but the doctor, very

properly, would not allow it. It was quite a glaring affair. She tried to jump down the man's throat, as people say.'

'But the Birmingham affair,' said his lordship, somewhat impatiently.

'I am coming to it. From what I can gather, the facts are these. Miss St. Pierre and Miss Mapleson ran away from home, without saying a word to anybody, and went to Birmingham, where they put up at an hotel, and when they were found they had picked up a gentleman, and had him to dinner.'

'Scandalous!' exclaimed Lord D'Estanger. 'Bless me, I could never have believed it. Thank you, my dear, you shall have the bracelet from Streeter's. I thank you sincerely; you have behaved with great moderation. You could not have behaved better. I can see that you have a due regard for Christian charity, and did not wish to make out a bad case against your friend.'

'I would rather—much rather—have said nothing at all, Lord D'Estanger, as you know,' protested Miss Marsham.

'I know it, my dear; you are a good girl, and you shall have the bracelet. We must become better acquainted.'

'With all my heart. Is there anything I can do for you, or fetch you, to make you more comfortable?'

'No thank you, I am quite comfortable. Leave me now, I have done talking for the present.'

Mabel Marsham tripped away with a smile which showed that she was pleased with herself, and that, in her own opinion, she had not done such a bad morning's work.

When the 'Swan' got into Hampton Court, or Moulsey Lock as it is more correctly called, Mr. Allison Mowbray sprang on board and was soon shaking hands with Mr. Stoke Newington. Though Eveline was standing with Captain Seyton and some other gentlemen close to him, he merely favoured her with a bow and went on talking to Mr. Newington.

Eveline had dreaded an interview with him, but finding he took no notice of her she was piqued. Her chagrin was unmistakable, and she stamped her little foot impatiently upon the deck, while she waited in vain for him to speak to her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

'FOUND OUT.'

'OH, here is Mr. Mowbray!' exclaimed Lady Wareham. 'I ought to scold you, but better late than never, you know. Did you miss the train?'

'Unfortunately, I did. However, I came by another route, calculating that I should meet you here. Had I not done so, I should have taken a fly and gone on to Sunbury or Hallyford.'

'Have we not quite a successful gathering?'

'Very much so. But that is a matter of course when you take anything in hand, Lady Wareham.'

'Oh, you flatterer! Oh, base! base!' cried her ladyship, with a playful movement of her well-gloved hand. Mr. Grosvenor Johnson came up with Harrow Tenterdean, and her ladyship added—'Now, we must be careful, or we shall be reported. Mr. Johnson will have us in the *Cynical Smiler*. Oh, yes, you will, bad man; do not deny it. It is your boast that you never spare your friends.'

'Unless they have a title,' put in Harrow Tenterdean, 'that brings immunity. If there is one thing which has a greater privilege, and should be held more sacred than another in the eyes of my friend, Mr. Grosvenor Johnson, it is the old nobility of this favoured land. Happy indeed is the aristocracy of a country which can rely upon the friendship of that portion of the press whose province it is to ridicule and irritate by verbal remarks of a sarcastic tendency.'

'If you were only addressing a jury,' said Lady Wareham.

'My friend Tenterdean will have his joke,' exclaimed Mr. Grosvenor Johnson. 'We must put him in the paper.'

'On it, if you like, with a handsome salary,' remarked Tenterdean, with a smile.

'That is young Hinton, is it not? young Lord Hinton,' continued Grosvenor Johnson, 'brother to the Duke of Oldcastle. Bless me, yes, I must run and speak to his lordship; we are like brothers. He dined at my house last Sunday—'

splendid fellow, and likes the groove of commerce. He is negotiating a loan now to assist the Carlist cause in Spain. Ah, my lord, how do ? how do you do ?' he added, waving his arm. 'Be with you in a moment, my lord.'

Eveline was leaning very pensively against the side rails of the 'Swan,' when she caught Mr. Mowbray's eyes fixed upon her. She beckoned him. Directly she had done so she felt annoyed, but it was too late ; he advanced slowly towards her.

'You called me,' he exclaimed.

'Yes. I—I do not know why. Are we friends?' she stammered, scarcely knowing what to say.

'The very best in the world. I would not come to you at first because you should not reproach me as you did last time we met, and declare that I compromised you, when nothing was further from my intention. When Fate has decreed a thing I leave it to be worked out in Fate's own way. I have told you we shall be man and wife. It will come to pass. It is written ; why then shall I exert myself ?'

'If you can only favour me with a repetition of that trash you had better stay away,' exclaimed Eveline.

'As you please, shall I go ?'

'Yes—no.'

'Which do you mean ?'

'I do not care. I feel reckless to day. D'Estanger and I have quarrelled about you.'

'What does your heart say ?'

'You have no right to ask. I shall not tell you. Please leave me.'

Mr. Mowbray favoured Eveline with a peculiar smile and went away. Presently Ada Mapleson and Mr. Stoke Newington came up. They had been flirting dreadfully, and Ada whispered to her friend—

'I think he will propose to-day.'

'Will he?' answered Eveline, indifferently, thinking of something else, and feeling that all the proposals in the world just then would not interest her.

Mrs. St. Pierre had been seeking her daughter, and when she met her, said—

'Eveline, how ill you look ; so pale. What is the matter ? Why do you neglect D'Estanger ? it is not politic. One of the Marsham girls has been talking to him, I don't know how long.'

‘Which one?’

‘Mabel.’

‘If I get near that girl I’ll make her remember the circumstance,’ exclaimed Eveline, reddening; ‘the little mischief-making minx. I should like to tear her chignon off, throw it in the water and pitch her in after it; the beast, I hate her!’

It was some relief at last to find some one upon whom to pour out the volume of her pent up wrath, and she began to feel relieved.

‘Never mind her,’ said her mother, coaxingly, ‘you have nothing to fear there. Do not leave the old man too much alone, that is all.’

‘I will go to him now. We have had a tiff, but I will make it up; it is nothing. I can twist the old fool round my fingers,’ exclaimed Eveline, confidently.

The music was sounding very pleasantly, and every one seemed in the highest spirits; an awning had been raised to protect those who felt the sun from its heat. Beneath this Lord D’Estanger had taken refuge. He was alone, that is to say, there was no one near him with whom he was acquainted.

‘I am better tempered now,’ she said; ‘if you want to bully me any more, you can; I shall not fly at you as I did before.’

‘Be candid with me, Eveline,’ replied Lord D’Estanger; ‘tell me all about your stay at Lowersham, will you?’

‘Certainly, I would have done so before had you asked me in that way. I cannot bear being driven; there is not much to tell, but what there is you shall hear.’

Eveline thought that Miss Mabel Marsham had been giving Lord D’Estanger her version and that he wished to get Eveline’s and compare the two, to see which was the most truthful. So she resolved to be perfectly frank with him.

Accordingly she began her tale, with an artless simplicity which was not without its charm, and dwelt on the ice episode which made her hearer shudder. He did not wonder that she felt grateful to the man who had delivered her from such a peril. The Birmingham affair she treated as a joke, and explained her meeting with Mr. Charles Danvers Dagley. His lordship laughed at the Birmingham affair when it was all told him, and he admitted that it was not such a very serious affair after all, though she could fairly be charged with

indiscretion, and he trusted that she had by this time sown all that sort of wild oats.

'Is it made up?' said Eveline, at the conclusion of her recital.

'Quite. I have not a word to say,' rejoined Lord D'Estanger, who was once more the submissive lover.

The 'Swan' was towed past the lock cut, and moored in the rushing waters of the dashing weir, which the ladies declared had a delightful effect. Dinner was served on board, and a plank connected the boat with the shore, so that those who liked could go on land and walk about. Eveline availed herself of this, and with two or three men strolled about, until feeling tired she sat down under a tree near the weir, and looked at the ever-gliding water, disappearing in a cloud of foam, and marvelled much at the restlessness of the brimming river.

Suddenly Allison Mowbray's voice sounded in her ear; he had found her out he said, and wanted her to take a stroll. She did not care about it, she was very comfortable as she was. He pressed her and at last she yielded. They wandered about by the pleasant banks of the stream and talked nonsense, Eveline feeling dreadfully worried and wishing that he would go and leave her alone once more.

She was in a melancholy mood, and wanted sadly to be alone.

'Where is D'Estanger?' she asked.

'I left him walking about near the boat,' rejoined Mowbray; 'he said he should sit down and watch the fishes. But why talk of him? You know you do not love him.'

'Love him!' repeated Eveline in a tone of scorn.

They were near the weir themselves now, having made a circuit and come back to their original starting place.

'May and December never really mate, though they may come together by some strange chance. Is it not shameful that there should be a woman market, where a rich old man can go and make bids for the loveliest, the fairest, and the rarest. Do you not feel humiliated, Miss St. Pierre, when you reflect that you have been put up to auction as it were, and sold to the highest bidder, just as much as if you were a slave in the old days of the confederacy.'

'Bought! what do you mean, Mr. Mowbray?'

'Simply that Lord D'Estanger has consented to pay a mag-

nificent price for you. Is it not so? Nay, do not be impatient. The truth may be unpalatable, but I am resolved that you shall hear it. The old peer has bought you, and yet you are not ashamed of it!’

Eveline’s eyes flashed fire.

‘If you take his part, it will only be because your pride is hurt, not because you love him.’

‘I will be frank with you, Mr. Mowbray, in spite of your insolence. I do not love him. How can one care for a dried-up old mummy, but——’

Eveline broke off abruptly.

A cry was heard close by them, which was followed by another, still more despairing and terror-stricken than the first.

Eveline and Mr. Mowbray rushed to the bank, and looked into the foaming torrent, where they beheld a man struggling with the stream. A glance at the awfully white and fear-laden face sufficed to show the heartless woman of the world, the mercenary adventuress, that it was Lord D’Estanger who was in this extreme peril. How had he come there? Had he been listening to her conversation with Mr. Mowbray? If so, was it the shock which her heartless words had caused him, which had occasioned his losing his balance, and falling backwards into the water?

While these uncomfortable thoughts were rushing through her brain, she did not cease to utter shriek upon shriek, and cry ‘Save him, oh, save him!’ She saw a chance of losing twenty thousand a-year and a coronet, and her anxiety that the poor old gentleman might not be drowned knew no bounds.

Mr. Allison Mowbray was a good swimmer, but he stood apathetically by the bank, looking on at the drowning man without attempting to save him. Many of the party, attracted by Eveline’s heartrending cries, were assembled on the spot, but the danger of the weir was so well-known that even the hardiest hung back. The channel was so full of crags and sunken pieces of rock and stone, that swimming was out of the question. To one of these stones Lord D’Estanger was clinging desperately with both hands.

How long he could maintain that position was a question which many debated in their minds without being able to settle the question, though his lordship was getting weaker

and weaker every moment ; and if he gave up his hold nothing could save him, he must infallibly be swept along, his head would come in contact with some impediment and he would be drowned.

Fortunately for him a boatman from Weybridge, who had come up in his punt to see if he could sweep up any unconsidered trifles, beheld the catastrophe from afar, and punted vigorously up, against steam, being greatly encouraged by the shouts of those who lined the bank.

He succeeded by dint of wonderful exertions to reach the spot just as Lord D'Estanger was giving way, and catching the body he hauled it into the punt and laid it down at full length. His lordship was not insensible though much exhausted, and he whispered some instructions to the boatman, who instead of returning to the 'Swan' swung down rapidly with the current in the direction of the town.

Eveline thought that it would only become her to show some agitation at this untimely event, and she no sooner saw that Lord D'Estanger was safe than she fainted away in Mr. Allison Mowbray's arms, who laid her down on the grass and called for salts.

Here was a new sensation, and the ladies interested themselves about Eveline, who soon recovered herself, asking in a pathetic voice if he was safe. Being answered in the affirmative, though she was already perfectly well aware of the fact, she seemed much relieved, and begged and entreated to be taken to him, which however was impossible as no one knew where he had gone.

Messengers were dispatched to the town, who after a time brought word that his lordship had changed his wet clothes at an inn, had some brandy-and-water, and seeking the railway station had gone back to town by a train which happened to be just ready to start.

A short note of apology to Mr. Stoke Newington, informed that gentleman of the fact, and alleged as a reason for his sudden departure a shock to the nerves and a fear that he might catch cold, after such a ducking, if exposed to the night air.

Not a word about Eveline.

This silence distressed her, and induced her more than ever to believe that Lord D'Estanger had overheard her remark to Mr. Allison Mowbray ; if so she could not doubt that he

would break off the engagement definitively, and that she would be thrown upon society again, the laughing-stock of all her acquaintances. This reflection made her bite her lips with vexation, and she was very dull and quiet all the way home, which was put down to her anxiety respecting his lordship, and some girls, who did not like her, were forced to admit that Eveline St. Pierre had more feeling in her than they had been inclined to give her credit for.

In vain Lady Wareham rallied her upon her low spirits. She was quite glad when the 'Swan' reached Teddington, and the music and the dancing on deck in the moonlight was all over. Algy Seyton had caught her in a corner, and asked her for a kiss, which she had for the first time in his life refused him, much to his astonishment, but as he saw that she was not in the melting mood he did not press her.

'Eveline returned to town with her mother by train, and as soon as she reached Eaton Square, which she did not do before eleven, she was given a note which she at once saw was in Lord D'Estanger's handwriting. There was something wrong. In her own expressive phraseology there was a 'screw loose.'

'What is it, Evie?' asked her mother.

'Oh, don't bother me just now, I can't bear it,' replied Eveline, going hastily into the drawing-room.

'May not one speak to you?' said Mrs. St. Pierre, following her.

'No!' ejaculated Eveline, snappishly.

She broke open the seal, and sinking into a chair, read the letter, which ran as follows :—

'MY DEAR MISS ST. PIERRE,

'I would call you Eveline, but I feel that I have no longer a right to do so. Unhappily for my future peace of mind, I overheard your conversation with Mr. Allison Mowbray, who is a man I have always dreaded. What I heard confirmed my suspicions. But what has pained me most is your duplicity, your thorough heartlessness, and the theatrical part you have played when with me. These are harsh words, my dear young lady; I know it. The occasion, however, is one which calls for strong language—strong, do I say?—the most forcible that I can employ; but I will spare you my reproaches. It is as well that I should be more candid with you than you have

been with me. Of course I could not wish you to mate yourself with a dried-up old mummy, which was, I believe, the phrase you applied to me. I will not be sure that I have quoted you correctly, for the epithet is one so unpleasant to me, that I have not taken the trouble to record it in all its integrity in my mind. No doubt I deserve it. I know I am old. Perhaps you have only treated me as I deserve. What I blame you for is, saying one thing before my face, and another behind my back. This is not kind or right. It is not honest. I am glad that I have discovered your real character, though I almost lost my life through it, and I now write to say, that I unconditionally release you from your engagement with me; you are free to do what you like; to go and make fools of more men, and with your daring falsehoods lead them into an abyss from which they will have as much difficulty in escaping, perhaps, as I had. I hope I have not insulted you; such, believe me, is not my intention, but I am so distracted that I scarcely know what I write. I am only clear and positive about one point, that we must never meet again, or, if we do, only as strangers. I cannot forgive you for the way in which you have treated me—not as yet, at least; though, I will try to be less harsh in my thoughts about you. The time will come when you will regret what you have this day said, and when it does come, think of me, and my broken heart.—Adieu for ever,

‘D’ESTANGER.’

‘Read that,’ exclaimed Eveline, tossing the letter over to her mother. ‘That’s a pretty state of things, isn’t it? Who would have thought that some idle chatter of mine to Allison Mowbray would have broken off my match with D’Estanger. What a fool I have been! I could cry with vexation.’

‘I was afraid you were not managing that affair skilfully,’ said Mrs. St. Pierre, when she had finished the perusal of the letter. ‘It is very provoking. What you are to do I am sure I do not know. Your papa and I, thinking you were going to get married, have arranged to give up this house, and have taken apartments at the Clarendon.’

‘Oh, don’t worry yourself!’ exclaimed Eveline; ‘I shan’t break my heart about that old fool D’Estanger, though it is provoking. If I had given him up it would have been different. I must write and say that I can’t have him, and pretend I have not got his letter, or something of that sort. I

never allow a man to have the laugh at me. I will be married in a month, mama, some way or other, so you can go on giving up your house. Don't consider me. If you did, it would be the first time in your life.'

'That is unkind, Evie, when I have done so much for you,' said Mrs. St. Pierre, in an offended tone.

'When? It must have been so long ago that I have forgotten all about it.'

'You are an ungrateful girl.'

'That's right. Run me down. Make a set at me. You always do, I notice, if any one else does. Just when I want sympathy, and moral support, and a moderate share of petting, all I get is abuse.'

'I am sure, my dear, I did not abuse you.'

'Didn't you? It was very much like it, then. Well, good-night. I am off to bed. I am going to Ascot to-morrow with the Lewson Gores, and I want to look my best.'

Ringling for her maid, Eveline, after tearing Lord D'Estanger's letter into a hundred pieces and throwing them viciously into the grate, went off to the bedroom, not in the most enviable state of mind.

CHAPTER XIX.

'ACCEPTING HER FATE.'

It soon got about that the match between Eveline St. Pierre and Lord D'Estanger was broken off; some said one thing, some another. The version Eveline gave her friends of the affair was that the man was too old, and, on consideration, she found she could not conscientiously marry him.

The idea of Eveline doing anything conscientiously was delicious to those who knew her well, and she had to put up with great ridicule from some of her acquaintances.

Algy Seyton was especially severe, and lost no opportunity of tormenting her, but she did not say much, and the affair was soon forgotten in the bustle of London life.

In the meantime Ada Mapleson had received an offer of marriage from Mr. Stoke Newington and had accepted him. He was madly in love with her, and, having fixed the day, preparations were made for the wedding.

When Eveline heard of it she congratulated her friend and said—

'You shall not be married before me, Ada; we will be married on the same day.'

'You!' exclaimed Ada; 'I thought your affair with D'Estanger was broken off?'

'So it is.'

'Are you engaged again?'

'No, but I mean to accept my fate,' rejoined Eveline, with a light laugh.

'Who, may I ask, is the happy man?'

'You shall know in due time. I am not in the habit of telling my secrets to every one, and I cannot tell this even to you, Addie. You will see soon.'

Soon afterwards Ada went out with Mr. Newington, looking very much overdressed, and with half a duck in her hat, as Eveline said. It was a common remark of hers that, 'She could never teach that girl anything; she had a vicious taste

in dress, and always looked a cross between a duchess and a tradesman's wife.'

Eveline remained at home. She expected a visitor, and was restless and uneasy until Mr. Allison Mowbray was announced.

'Well, dear child,' she exclaimed as he entered, 'you wrote and told me you were coming, and wanted to see me. Here I am.'

Mr Mowbray advanced to the chair where she was sitting, and taking her hand in his pressed his lips to it.

'Thank you for waiting for me,' he said. 'I have come to talk seriously. All is at end between you and D'Estanger, therefore I may speak freely.'

'Certainly. The coronet is going begging again, and there is twenty thousand a-year for somebody,' replied Eveline with an attempt at gaiety.

'Let it go. Is not love and affection much better, and far preferable? I have come to tell you, Eveline, that I love you, and to ask you to be mine.'

The little hand still rested in his, and she made no effort to withdraw it.

'You have told me that before, and I have laughed at you,' she answered; 'but now you shall hear something new to you. I accept my fate!'

'In other words you will be my wife?'

'I will,' she murmured.

'Dear, dear Eveline, you have made me the happiest of men!' exclaimed Allison Mowbray, with a look of triumph.

'Don't get too conceited over your conquest,' said Eveline, with her accustomed levity and impudence. 'I would not have had you if I could have got D'Estanger. Since he has cried off, I want some one to fall back upon. It is absolutely necessary that I should get married. I am getting old. Next year nobody would have me. They would say I was becoming *passé*, and I should not wonder if some had the hardihood to declare I was growing ugly, especially women who have held strong opinions, for the last two years that I dye my hair because it is more glossy than theirs.'

Allison Mowbray smiled.

'When you are a wife,' he said, 'you will overcome this giddiness.'

'Don't make too sure about that. I will be candid with

you, Allison. If I had consumption and the doctors told me I had only a year to live I should not be a bit quieter on that account. I must go ahead. It is in my disposition. Ours, you know, is not a foolish love-match.'

'On my side it is.'

'On mine it is not ; there is more candour for you. But don't look annoyed. We are all the more likely to be happy and get on well together. We must make allowance for one another. You wink at my faults, and I will look shyly at yours. We shall not be too exacting!'

'You are a wild little filly,' he said, laughingly, 'but I think I shall be able to break you in and tame you.'

'You may try, and you may succeed, but do you know what the result will be?' she asked, looking up seriously.

'No,' replied Mr. Mowbray, laconically.

'I will tell you,' said Eveline. 'You would crush my spirit, and I should go about moping. You would not like to see a tame spiritless thing crawling about your house, would you?'

'God forbid.'

'Very well. You must not be too severe, or that will be the result, if——'

'What?'

'If a separation does not part us.'

'I hope and believe, my dearest girl,' exclaimed Mr. Mowbray, 'that I could never tyrannize over a woman if she behaved well to me. And I am convinced that with all your levity you are really good, and will try to love me. I will say more—you do love me already.'

'If it is my fate, how can I help it?'

'You ridiculed me when I told you long, long ago that you would never marry Lord D'Estanger, did you not? I am a firm believer in destiny, as I told you then. I felt that my star was in the ascendant.'

'Is it now?'

'Of course it is. Have you not accepted me? Is not this the realization of the darling wish of my heart?'

'How can you possibly tell that your alliance with me will not bring you misery?' asked Eveline.

'Because I have too much confidence in my own judgment and in you,' he answered. 'In marriage very much depends on the man ; women want managing.'

'And you think you can manage a woman. Beware,' said Eveline, playfully, 'I am not an average woman.'

'Oh, I am quite content to run the risk, and now, my dearest one, let us seal the compact with a kiss.'

She held up her face and he kissed her tenderly.

'It is the first I ever let you have, is it not, Allison?' she asked.

He confessed that it was, and admitted that that fact made it all the sweeter.

Eveline always acted independently, and did not think it necessary to consult her mother when Mr. Mowbray asked her to fix the day, she replied off-hand, that she would be his that day six weeks.

When she saw Ada in the evening she told her what she had done, and Ada was intensely surprised.

'What,' she exclaimed, 'you are going to marry Mr. Mowbray after all! Is it not odd!'

Eveline saw nothing odd at all about it.

'I must have somebody,' she said, 'and the man is awfully spooney. I gave him one kiss this afternoon, and he nearly went mad over it. I am sure he loves me.'

'And do not you love him?'

'A little bit.'

'Is that all?'

'Quite enough too,' she answered; 'you only spoil men by being too civil to them.'

It may be mentioned here that Miss Mabel Marsham did not forget the promise Lord D'Estanger had made her respecting a bracelet, nor did the old nobleman forget it either. Two days after the water party, which was nearly ending so disastrously for himself, he called at Mrs. Marsham's house, and finding Mabel at home asked her if she would accompany him to the shop to choose the bauble he had promised her. He called it a bauble, as if he had a supreme contempt for gold and jewels, but Mabel determined that she would have something worth wearing and gladly consented.

As they drove along in the carriage, she was all radiant with smiles. It was such a triumph to have cut Eveline St. Pierre out, and she entertained the fond hope that she might hook the aged and amorous peer for herself. Certainly a little expression thrown into the face improves every one, and we all look better when in a good temper than when in a bad.

Lord D'Estanger thought that he had never seen Mabel Marsham look so well before, though he had often met her out. He even began to think that she would make a fond substitute for and a much better wife than the artificial and treacherous girl whom he had just thrown over.

'You must not be too extravagant, Lord D'Estanger,' exclaimed Mabel, with a winning smile. 'I only want some little pretty simple thing to remind me of your kindness and good nature.'

'You leave that to me, my dear young lady,' answered Lord D'Estanger.

'May I ask where you are going to take me?'

'To the best shop in London, as you will admit when you get there.'

The carriage drew up at Streeter's in Conduit Street, and Lord D'Estanger, getting out first, offered his hand to Mabel, who alighted with an airy grace peculiar to herself. They entered the shop together, and Mr. Streeter, immediately recognizing Lord D'Estanger, who was an old customer, asked what he could show him.

'Some of your handsomest bracelets, and let this young lady make her choice,' replied his lordship.

Mabel almost instantly had glittering before her pleased and astonished eyes a quantity of specimens of the best jewellery the world could produce, and gazed with admiration upon them. She was eventually induced to choose one which was cheap at fifty guineas, the price charged, and which she took away with her. Lord D'Estanger pressed her to have something more valuable and expensive, but she was contented with what she had selected and they went back to the carriage, his lordship having previously claimed the privilege of clasping it on her fair and slender wrist.

On the way home a little flirtation ensued, and Lord D'Estanger seemed inclined to revenge himself upon Eveline St. Pierre, by making love to a girl whom he had reason to believe was her enemy. Mabel Marsham exerted herself to the utmost to please her senile admirer, and she felt that she had succeeded when he put her down at her mother's door.

She had no sooner gained the shelter of the drawing-room, than she exclaimed to her mother and sister—

'Look at this love of a bracelet old D'Estanger has bought me. Is it not charming? I believe he already loves me to

distraction, only he is too timid to say so, and I must draw him out.'

Her mother and sister looked at the hand she held out and admired the present she had received, praising it in no measured terms.

'Your fortune is made, my dear Mabel,' exclaimed Mrs. Marsham; 'all you have to do is to play your cards carefully. It is all off between him and Eveline St. Pierre. I always said you were a clever girl, and if you marry a coronet you will realise my fondest hopes.'

And so the system of bargain and sale in Belgravia went on gaily, encouraged by those who should have been the first to discourage giving their daughters into a loathsome bondage, only tolerable on account of the gold which overlaid it, and which in a lower station of society, and under somewhat different circumstances, is called by a very harsh name, and visited with consequences of an unpleasant nature to the unhappy creatures who sell their charms to those who bid highest for them.

CHAPTER XX.

'MARRIED.'

GREAT preparations were made for the double wedding which was to take place. The brides bestowed as much attention on the happy gentlemen who were to be their husbands as they were able to spare from the engrossing occupation of dressing and arranging about their costumes and their trousseaux.

Three days before the time appointed for the bridal, Eveline and Ada were in the dining-room after lunch by themselves. The windows were open, allowing the breeze to perfume itself in its passage over the flowers in boxes which adorned the sills. Before the girls were some books of fashions, and they were debating about the best mode of trimming some article of feminine wearing apparel, when a servant announced that a poorly-dressed woman was at the door, and wished to see the young lady who was going to be married.

'That is very vague, James,' replied Eveline; 'we are both in that position. Is it Miss Mapleson or myself she wants to see? Go and ask her.'

The footman went back, and after being absent some time, returned with the intelligence that it was the lady who was engaged to Mr. Newington.

'That's you, Ada,' said Eveline, with a look of curiosity; 'will you see her?'

'Why not?' inquired Ada, trembling in spite of herself.

'Oh, if you please miss,' added James, 'I forgot to say that the woman has a baby.'

'A baby!' repeated Eveline; 'dear me, let her come in. It is always well to see people,' she added to Ada.

A minute elapsed and then a woman, neatly but inexpensively dressed, came into the dining-room, ushered by James, in whose eye there was a merry twinkle, as if its owner thought there was something comical in the wind; but encountering the glance of his young mistress, he became instantly preter-

naturally calm, and beat a hasty retreat, though he took care to listen with the utmost possible attention at the door.

'You wish to see Miss Mapleson, who is engaged to be married to Mr. Stoke Newington in three days? There she is,' exclaimed Eveline, who did not ask her visitor to sit down, but purposely kept her standing.

The woman was about five-and-twenty, rather pretty, though slightly dissipated in appearance, very impudent and unconcerned in her manner. She at once threw herself into a chair, saying—'You might ask a body to sit. It's no joke carrying a ten months old child in your arms, all about these blessed squares, I can tell you. He's quite a lump; feel him and weight him, if you don't believe me.'

'Thank you,' answered Eveline, drawing back, 'I have no wish to do either one or the other. Perhaps you will say what you have to say, and go, as we are engaged.'

'I shan't hurry. There's no call to hurry that I know on,' answered the woman. 'I've come to give you some news that will make you prick up your ears, but I've had a world of trouble to find you out, though these are nice houses when you once get inside of them.'

'Will you be good enough to explain the object of your visit?' cried Eveline, angrily.

'Which is the Mrs. Newington as is to be?' asked the woman.

'I have already told you.'

'Is it not you?'

'No.'

'I wish it was; you seem a stuck-up piece of goods, and being taken down a little wouldn't hurt you,' answered the woman with the baby; adding, 'I know Newington, he was a Cambridge man, and I'm a Cambridge woman. This is his baby.'

Ada Mapleson uttered a cry and nearly fainted.

Eveline exclaimed, indignantly—

'You make that admission, and you dare to come here, carrying the child of your shame in your arms. I will have you turned out of the house at once. Infamous! Unheard of!'

Her hand was upon the bell-rope, but the woman exclaimed—

'Don't you be so fast. I never see a girl run on so. The

child's right enough ; I'm married to him, and I've got my lines in my pocket. Newington's my husband.'

Then she rocked her baby up and down, and chuckled quietly the while.

Ada had turned very pale, and was listening with the air of one distracted, but when she heard the announcement that her affianced lover, Mr. Stoke Newington, was the husband of the creature before her, she could scarcely believe the evidence of her senses, and rising, she advanced to her, and exclaimed, in a tremulous voice—

'Are you sure of what you say? Be careful. It is dangerous to speak untruths; people can be punished for telling falsehoods.'

The woman's only answer was to fumble in her pocket and produce a dirty crumpled piece of paper, which she carefully spread out, smoothing away the creases with the palm of her hand.

'There's the certifiket,' she said ; 'read it. I suppose you've been taught your letters. I never was, but I've had this read to me and it's right enough, it is.'

Both Eveline and Ada read the copy of the marriage register, which duly certified that one Mary Ann Bloggs was the wife of Stoke Newington, gentleman.

'It must be a mistake,' said Eveline. But Ada, overcome by violent emotion, sank back in a chair and covering her face with her hands wept silently.

'It ain't no mistake,' said Mrs. Newington with an injured air ; 'why shouldn't a gentleman follow his fancy?'

'Does he know you are in London?'

'No, that's the best of it. I had some money to go to New York and he thought I went, but I did not; I stuck to the money and opened a shop. I'm in it now, and should have been quiet enough if I hadn't seen something about an approaching marriage in high life between Miss Somebody or other, and Mr. Stoke Newington. "No, you don't, my fine gentlemen," I said to myself, and determined that there should be a little scene in low life first. "Yes," she went on, "I've a beautiful shop in the Borough, all in the fancy line, pins, needles, tapes, ribbons, toys, sweets, children's dolls, gingerbread and such. Come and give us a call, I'm sure I'll make you welcome. It's just at the top of the High Street, up a court. Ask any of the children for Newington's and they'll take you direct.'

'Thank you,' answered Eveline stiffly; 'but, although you may have amused yourself in coming here, I cannot see your object in calling. If you are what you say you are, why did you not seek your husband?'

'My 'usban'!' exclaimed the woman. 'Ah! you don't know Newington. He's so artful. He'd have smoothed me over. I was determined to put a stopper on the marriage, and the best way, thinks I, of doing that will be to see the gal.'

There was some force in this argument, and Eveline did not attempt to controvert it.

'Very well,' she answered. 'The matter shall be inquired into. I have your address, I think. You had best go now, there is nothing to keep you here.'

'Don't make any mistake,' said the woman in her coarse vulgar way. 'I shall prosecute him if I don't appear in the church. He may try to deceive me and get married on the sly, but I shall give him in charge, so I tell you. As for going, of course I can go, but you might ask a body to have a glass of wine first.'

Eveline was about to tell her to help herself, when a loud knock at the door startled her. She advanced to the door, and opening it saw Mr. Stoke Newington in the hall; he had just been admitted by a footman who was about to show him into the drawing room, but Eveline exclaimed—

'Come this way, will you please, I want to talk to you.'

'With pleasure,' rejoined Mr. Newington lifting his hat with his usual grace. 'Is Addie with you, dear child? she did not seem well yesterday, and I have been so anxious about her.'

Mr. Newington entered the dining room, and Eveline quickly shut the door behind him so that there should be no escape.

He took in the situation at a glance. Ada in an armchair crying, the vulgar woman with the baby, and Eveline, with a mischievous smile on her face, maintaining her place near the door.

Looking from one to the other he was quite bewildered, and knew not what to say. It was a relief to him when Eveline exclaimed, 'I have arranged a little surprise for you, Mr. Newington.'

'Oh, Johnny, Johnny!' said the vulgar woman, holding up the baby, and coming forward. 'Where have you been? and

how could you treat one so? Take your child and kiss him, bless his little heart. He's the image of you, and you to neglect him so!

'My good woman,' replied Mr. Stoke Newington, recovering his equanimity. 'I don't want to know anything about you or your child.'

Eveline, fearing a disagreeable scene, interposed, saying—

'Just allow me one moment, Mr. Newington. This matter can easily be settled. Is this person your wife as she asserts? Yes, or no, if you please.'

'When I was an undergraduate at Cambridge, I was foolish enough to strike up an alliance——'

'Will you please answer my question without any circumlocution. Is that woman your wife or not?'

'He can't deny it, I've got my certiffket,' put in the woman. 'Speak up like a man, Johnny, and own to it.'

'I admit that I married her, but legal measures for a divorce—folly of youth—thought her dead——' stammered Mr. Newington.

Eveline, interrupting him in her practical manner, exclaimed—'Thank you, that is quite enough—that will do! Perhaps you will have the goodness to take your wife away from this house; as for you, I shall merely say that your conduct to my friend, Miss Mapleson, is wholly inexcusable. We will get the men of the family to speak to you. Now go!'

During this scene Ada did nothing but cry. Mr. Newington looked sheepishly at her several times, but she resolutely refused to meet his eye.

The imperious way in which Eveline addressed him, coupled with his knowledge of her decided character, influenced him strongly in determining to withdraw at once. He saw that for her friend's sake she would not say more about the affair than was absolutely necessary, and he put an end to a most embarrassing position by saying in a low voice—

'Come with me, Polly, we will talk outside.'

'I want some of this wine,' she said, pointing to a decanter.

'Outside,' he replied, in a tone of entreaty, 'come along.'

'Kiss the cherub, then,' she exclaimed, holding up the baby.

He was obliged to comply with this request, and did so, Eveline being scarcely able to contain her laughter. Then the husband and wife, ill-assorted pair, took their departure, the

former being too much annoyed and confused to say more than—

‘I will seek a fitting opportunity to explain all this, Miss St. Pierre. Assure Miss Mapleson that I am not to blame, not in the least. I will put myself right with her without delay.’

Eveline bowed stiffly.

When the door had closed behind them, she went to Ada and endeavoured to comfort her, but this was a more difficult task than she had anticipated. She told her that the affair would not get about, she would take care of that. Some reason for breaking off the engagement must be found, and perhaps on the continent Ada would pick up somebody else equally eligible.

‘Men, dear child,’ she said, ‘are always falling head over ears in love. Some seem to have nothing else to do. Absurd! in a month or two you will get some one as good as Newington, and you shall accompany Mowbray and I on our wedding tour.’

‘Oh, no, no, no,’ sobbed Ada as if her heart would break. ‘I will go home. I have been a wicked bad girl, and this is my punishment. I thought I could defy my mother and father, and I find that heaven will not let me. I will go back to Lowersham and say that I have sinned, and if they will take me back I will never, never try any more to be a Girl of the Period and make a good match, giving my hand where my heart can never go. I believe now I love Ernest Lacy much more than all the fine gentlemen I have seen—oh! oh!’

Eveline regarded her with a smile of contempt mingled with pity.

‘You are labouring under a disappointment now,’ she said; ‘when it has worn off you will get into spirits again; have some wine, dear, to cheer you up. I confess it is a great bore to lose a man with a lot of money. I felt it so when D’Estanger gave me up, but I did not break my heart over it.’

‘I shall never be myself again,’ answered Ada, still crying.

‘Nonsense, don’t be silly. Newington is not worth another thought. Who would have imagined that he had made such a goose of himself at Cambridge! I don’t like Cambridge men, never did. They are bad form as a rule, though all university men are objectionable. They are only a sort of schoolboys.’

Ada rose, and without saying anything to her friend, left the room and ran upstairs. When she had gained the privacy of her own chamber, she took her writing desk, and began a letter to her mother, which was couched in the most penitent language. She said :—

‘MY DEAR, DEAR MAMMA,

‘I write to beg you to forgive me, and take me back to your loving heart. I have been very wicked and bad, but I now see the error of my ways, and wish to make all possible amends for my guilty folly. You will ask how and why this change has come about. I can only tell you briefly. I was engaged, as you know, to a rich man, but I find that he has been married to some low creature. All is at an end between us, and rather than go through any more London fashionable life, and be a party to its shams, and its pretences—it’s *so* artificial and hollow—I would gladly die. Oh, my dear mother, my only true friend, I long so to hide my face in the folds of your dress, and kneeling at your feet acknowledge my faults, and beg your forgiveness. You will grant it me, will you not? I am not really bad. I have only been silly. Try to forgive me, pray, pray do! I do not ask you to do this because my friends here will have me no longer. They want me to go on the continent, but I act from sincere conviction. Take me home. Take me home. Take me home. I will do anything you ask me, and I may add that which I am sure will please you, after examining my own heart thoroughly, I find that I really do love honest, long-suffering, Ernest Lacy. Will he too forgive me? If so I will try to make him a good, affectionate, and loving wife. I see my folly now in its true light, and I am disgusted with myself. Eveline has been very kind to me, but I must say that she dazzled me, and I wanted to be like her. As soon as you write to me, dear mamma, I will come down. If I did not think that I had offended you deeply, I would come at once. Please telegraph to me. I am so—so anxious to get away from here.

‘I am, dearest mamma, with fondest love, your truly penitent child,

‘ADA.’

As soon as this was written she sent it to the post; by eleven o’clock the next day she received a telegram, which

was brief, but to the point. It simply said, "Come." Two hours afterwards she had taken leave of her friends in Eaton Square, and was *en route* for Lowersham.

The joy of her friends may be easily imagined, but we have not time to dwell upon the delight with which the return of the prodigal—if the expression is applicable—was welcomed ; we must follow the fortunes of the Girl of the Period, whose matrimonial affair flowed with a smoother course. She was married to Mr. Allison Mowbray at St. Paul's, Knightsbridge. The breakfast was given at Mr. St. Pierre's house, and after the usual toasts had been drunk, the happy pair started for Paris, where they intended to stop a month, during which time Silver Pines was being prepared for their reception.

Eveline experienced a sense of triumph when she left the church a bride, though she had made vows which had no meaning in them, and spoken falsehoods in the sight of heaven. Mr. Allison Mowbray's delight was far more real than hers, and for this reason. He had set his heart upon making the splendid creature his wife, when she was engaged to another ; all through her engagement to Lord D'Estanger he had done this, and never lost an opportunity of disgusting his lordship with her superficiality and unreal manner.

It was principally owing to him that the match was broken off.

Eveline could trace his active influence in the matter from the beginning. He had declared that it was her fate to marry him, and what he had said was actually accomplished.

As they were whirled along in the train to Dover, where they intended to stay, Mowbray took every opportunity of squeezing her hand, and telling her with the language of the eyes—his admiring glances being more eloquent than words—that he loved her dearly.

She experienced a sense of loneliness almost amounting to that of a captive in solitary confinement.

Her heart was not Mowbray's. She had not given it to her husband. Indeed she scarcely knew to whom she had given it. So many men had had the charge of her heart from time to time, that it was difficult to say in whose keeping it was.

Certain it is that the man she had married was not the possessor of her virginal affection. She sighed wearily and turned away from his caresses as if tired of her position,

though she was only the bride of a few hours. He had settled some money upon her—a thousand a-year, so that she was independent, and the thought flashed through her mind that she could always have a separation if she was not satisfied with him.

‘You seem the least bit tired and out of sorts, my dearest one,’ exclaimed Allison Mowbray in the train.

‘I was thinking of Ada Mapleson,’ she rejoined.

‘Yes! Ah! You have more cause to be happy than she, poor girl! Are you not much obliged to her, though, for one thing?’

‘What’s that?’

‘Being instrumental in bringing us together.’

‘I cannot tell—as yet I mean,’ answered Eveline evasively.

‘Why not?’

‘Oh! Marriage is such an awful lottery.’

‘What! doubts already, my pet?’ he exclaimed in a tone of annoyance.

‘I have had them all along, but you were my fate, you know. You told me so. What use was it in me to resist my fate?’

‘Why did not you make me the recipient of your confidence?’

‘I never yet reposed confidence in any one,’ replied Eveline.

‘But your husband——’

‘Is no exception to the rule.’

‘Ah, Evie,’ said Allison Mowbray, with a sigh as prolonged as one she had just given vent to. ‘I fear very much that you don’t love me as I love you.’

‘I am very sure I do not,’ she answered.

‘You need not tell me so. Pray keep your flattering opinions to yourself,’ he exclaimed, with a show of rising anger.

‘It is best to be candid. If you indulge no high aspirations you will not be disappointed.’

He slipped his arm round her waist, and drawing her closer to him—they were alone in the carriage—kissed her tenderly.

‘It is only your temper, dearest love,’ he said, kindly; ‘I will not blame you for it, and on our wedding day, too! What a bad omen it would be to have a quarrel so soon!’

Again he kissed her, but there was no responsive motion of her lips.

‘Darling one!’ he murmured, ‘I may kiss you, may I not?’

‘I am your wife, Allison ; you know a man may kiss his own wife. What stupid questions you ask !’

‘Would you rather I should not kiss you ?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘What do you think ?’

‘Oh ! please don’t worry. I have not taken the trouble to think about it at all,’ replied Eveline.

Allison Mowbray stared at her in astonishment. It passed his comprehension that a bride on her wedding-day should not have decided in her own mind whether kissing was nice, and she liked it or not.

As for Eveline, she appeared perfectly indifferent to everything, and looked vacantly out of the window.

CHAPTER XXI.

'THE INTERCEPTED LETTER.'

THERE was nothing new or striking in Paris to Eveline ; she had always been in the best Parisian society, and although the French capital could not be anything but agreeable to a girl of her lively disposition, she grew horribly tired of existence there, and in a few days began to express a wish to go somewhere else.'

They were at breakfast at the 'Bristol,' and Allison Mowbray, who had been kind, attentive, and affectionate, and seemed very happy when she smiled upon him, said 'I like this dear old Paris, don't you, Evie?'

'It is well enough,' she answered.

'Can you say nothing more in its favour?'

'What do you want me to say?' she demanded petulantly.

'Oh! I don't want you to say anything, you might take the trouble to be decently civil.'

'Common civility is thrown away upon you. You want a woman to worship you, but I shall not do anything of the sort. It is a mistake on your part to be so exacting.'

'I am not aware that I have refused to give way to you in any one thing, Eveline,' answered Allison Mowbray in a stern tone.

'It would have made very little difference if you had,' she answered, with a tantalizing laugh.

'You can be very provoking when you like. Upon my word, I——'

He hesitated.

'Pray go on. If you use violent language, I shall not be in the least astonished, though it may shock me a little. I knew I was not marrying a gentleman when I had you.'

'Why did you marry me then?'

'Why? Oh! because I was poor, *faute d'argent*, you know; because I wanted another name. I can give you a host of reasons.'

'Perhaps your own name was not in such good repute as it might have been.'

'Possibly you think that very severe,' she answered. 'If you do, you are mistaken. It has no effect upon me. It is more true than you think. That affair of mine with D'Estanger did me no good, and if you will have reasons, you may know that I married you as a precautionary measure.'

'Against what?'

'Scandal chiefly. People are so illiberal. If I had remained single much longer I should have been told that I could not get any one to have me, and that, after being thrown over by D'Estanger, would not have been pleasant. The fact was I wanted to be revenged on the old man. They say he is going to marry Mabel Marsham. I wish him joy of her, what a life she will lead him. The cat? I hate her. She dyes her hair black. It is as red as a carrot naturally. He will find that out when it is too late.'

'I think you should send him an anonymous letter,' said Allison Mowbray with a sneer.

'I hope I have never given you any cause for accusing me of so low a thing. Sending anonymous letters is more in your way I should think than mine,' rejoined Eveline, with some asperity; 'when I get to Silver Pines I must hear what Mr. Dagley has to say about you.'

'Perhaps you will be good enough to let Dagley alone, and mind your own business.'

'Don't go pale over it. If you are in the man's power, I suppose you cannot help it,' said Eveline.

Allison Mowbray's handsome face became shaded, and he said gravely—'I am afraid I have done wrong in marrying you.'

'Have you only just found that out? That is a discovery which a man of your discernment should have made long ago. You had recourse to all sorts of underhand devices to get hold of me. I only had you because I could not get the man I wanted, and you must take the consequences of your rashness.'

'They are likely to be dismal enough, God knows,' he said, sighing again.

'Well, don't give me the horrors. If you can't be agreeable, go out, or let me.'

'You may go where you like.'

'Thank you. I did not stand in need of the permission, but

having got it, I will proceed to avail myself of it. Order dinner at six ; I shall not dine at a *table d'hôte*.'

'I thought you had promised to meet my friends, the Vines, at the Grand. You certainly promised.'

'I never keep a promise when it is convenient to break it, and I don't like your friends, so that I shall not put myself out of the way to meet them. They are like yourself, neither polished or agreeable. Where you could have picked them up I can't imagine. Your set is not my set.'

'I want you to meet these people, Evie,' said Allison Mowbray, quietly. 'Do so, to oblige me.'

'I tell you no.'

'To please me. I will forget and forgive all you have said. Kiss me and make it up, Evie, dearest, and say you will go. This bickering will make our lives miserable. What is the use of being wretched? Kiss me, darling, and be good!'

'For goodness' sake, Allison, don't be uxorious,' exclaimed Eveline. 'I did not give you credit for sentiment when I married you. A sentimental man is more than I can bear. Do try and be matter-of-fact and practical.'

'Speak kindly to me, Evie dearest,' said Allison Mowbray beseechingly.

'I am affectionate enough, Allison,' she answered, 'but I do not approve of being demonstrative. One ought to have an air of repose ; it is the only thing which distinguishes us from the vulgar.'

'I could find it in my heart to wish that you were vulgar.'

'Don't do that. Let us understand one another, once for all. I will love you as much as——'

'Your passionless nature will permit.'

'Thank you for the interpolation. Not because I am usually at a loss for words, but you seldom give utterance to an original remark, that I appreciate such a thing when I meet with it. I was about to observe that we have taken each other for better, for worse, and must make the best of our bargain. We shall fall into each others ways by degrees. Do not exact too much. Look over my failings, humour my faults, which I I flatter myself lie on the surface, and I will do the same to you.'

'Very well, Evie, so be it ; but it is a sad let down for me. I had pictured you a perfect mine of affection.'

'Quite a mistake, my dear fellow. How could you have

done so? I am afraid you are a very poor judge of character. But we are man and wife now; one should always be careful in tying the knot with one's tongue which we cannot undo with our teeth. That's an old saying of Algy Seyton's.'

'He's in Paris, I see,' observed Mowbray.

'In Paris! Seyton in Paris! How delightful!' cried Eveline, throwing off her former apathy, and appearing gay and vivacious once more. 'You don't know how I adore that man, Allison.'

'If you do, you might keep your adoration to yourself. It is not exactly the thing to confide to a husband,' he answered dryly.

'If there was anything wrong about it, of course you would be the last person I should dream of telling, you stupid old goose!' answered Eveline, rising and going to him, and imprinting a kiss upon his forehead.

'Thanks for the chaste salute,' said Mr. Mowbray, laughing.

'You ought to be thankful for small favours,' she rejoined; 'a kiss is a kiss, wherever it may be bestowed. It is a pledge of conjugal affection. But with regard to Algy Seyton, you know he is an old friend, and I like him as a friend. He was never a flame of mine; that is, I never liked him well enough to marry him, though he was mad about me. You should have heard him rave sometimes, and all he got for his pains was a dismal snub.'

'You are rather a good hand at "dismal snubs," as far as my experience goes, Evie,' remarked Mr. Mowbray.

'Your experience is limited. Be content to wait.'

'For what?'

'Oh! ask the future. I am not a Cassandra. But you must not mind my enthusiasm, when Algy Seyton's name is mentioned. He is the best tempered, most good-natured, handsomest darling that ever lived, and yet our regard for one another is quite platonic—we are nothing more than brother and sister.'

'I never saw anything to admire in him. He is well enough in his way.'

'You men are never generous to one another. Never.'

'Are women.'

'I don't know. I can tell you nothing about women for I never studied them. I don't suppose they are worse than men. Where is Seyton—will you ask him here? Tell him he may dine with us.'

‘No. I think to-day the Vines have the first claim upon our time.’

‘Bother the Vines. Do as I tell you, or I shall have to hunt out Algy myself, the dear! I wonder he has not found me. He always used to call me his magnet. Where is he staying?’

‘Don’t know,’ answered Allison Mowbray, sullenly.

‘Oh! you jealous old thing!’ cried Eveline, laughing. ‘Upon my word I have roused the green-eyed monster by my chatter about Captain Seyton! What a joke!’

‘I can’t see anything at all funny about it. You go into raptures about a man.’

‘What woman could help it?’

‘Don’t expect any reciprocity from me, that is all,’ said Allison Mowbray, savagely.

‘I only expected one thing from you, and that I don’t get,’ she answered.

‘What is that?’

‘Gentlemanly treatment. If you spar with me, you will not have it all your own way. I can give as well as take, old fellow.’ She rang the bell.

‘What are you ringing for?’ he asked.

‘What on earth do you suppose? Can I not ring the bell if I choose?’ she rejoined sharply.

‘You want *Galignani*. You think the paper will tell you where that infernal fellow is stopping!’

‘Yes, you have hit it exactly. I did not give you credit for so much discernment,’ she answered coolly.

‘You shall not have it!’ cried Allison Mowbray, bringing his fist down with a thump on the table.

‘Shall I not—who is to prevent me? If my orders are countermanded in the hotel, I can go out, I suppose? I am not to be kept a prisoner, am I?’

‘Do you want to drive me mad?’ asked Allison Mowbray, pacing the room excitedly.

‘I have no wish one way or the other. If insanity is your particular fancy, I daresay I could get you comfortable quarters in a private asylum.’

‘I ought to have known that such a girl as you would not make a good wife!’

‘What a pity you did not find it out before,’ she answered mockingly.

'By George, that is the truest thing you have said all the morning. It *is* a pity. Showy girls like you, who think of nothing but dressing and flirting, are never to be relied on. I might have known that a woman who would treat one man badly could not treat another well. I have done a foolish thing.'

'Is it the first foolish or wicked thing you ever did in your life, Allison Mowbray?' she asked, fixing her keen, glittering eyes upon him.

'What do you mean?' he demanded, trembling visibly.

'I can't tell until I have seen Dagley.'

A waiter came in, and she ordered the paper she required.

Allison Mowbray jammed his hat down firmly on his head, and advancing to the door exclaimed—

'I am going out.'

Eveline took no notice of him.

'I am going out,' he repeated; 'do you hear me?'

'It would be odd if I did not when you bawl so. You have told me you are going out twice, why don't you go?'

'I don't know when I shall come back.'

'Oh!'

'Perhaps not at all.'

'Oh!'

'You will be sorry for this some day, Eveline,' exclaimed Mr. Mowbray.

This time she took no notice of him at all, and he went away. She did not pay the slightest attention to his exit, and exhibited no interest until the waiter brought her the journal. Amongst the fashionable arrivals at the Grand Hotel, she saw the name of Captain Seyton. That was enough for her, and when, half an hour afterwards, Allison Mowbray, very hot and excited, entered, she said—

'How flushed you are, dear. Where have you been? Any one would think you had started a velocipede and had got your first notion of a cropper. Come and sit down by me. Let his pet smoothe his ruffled feathers. She will dine with him at the Grand to-day, and she won't be a naughty thing any more.'

Allison Mowbray threw his arms round her, and strained her to his breast. The least approach on her part conciliated him in a moment. If she only met him half-way he was satisfied.

They dined at the *table d'hôte* at the Grand Hotel that day; and after dinner, Captain Seyton, who, as an old frequenter of the hotel, had a seat higher up the table, came down, and sitting by Mrs. Mowbray's side, chatted agreeably with her and husband. After expressing his delight at meeting old friends, he said there was a ball at the Embassy that night, and asked if they were going.

'I am tired of balls,' said Eveline.

'A married woman,' exclaimed Allison Mowbray, 'ought to be happy at home.'

'Don't oppose me, Mowbray; I am sure to do what I am told not to,' said Eveline, laughing.

'I presume your home happiness,' exclaimed Captain Seyton, 'is really the cause of your indifference to balls.'

Eveline heaved a deep sigh, and looked expressively at her former lover.

This look spoke clearly enough, and said that she was far from happy.

'I think I may venture to say that matrimony has made Eveline more steady,' remarked Mr. Mowbray.

'I cannot say that I am delighted to hear it, for a stay-at-home fit will deprive society of one of its brightest ornaments,' replied Captain Seyton.

'I can make no return for compliments, I am powerless to reward,' exclaimed Eveline.

'An additional ray of light in your eloquent eye, a more musical note in your melodious laughter, is reward amply sufficient.'

'Flatterer!'

'Pon my word, Seyton,' cried Mowbray, a little displeased, 'any one would think you had forgotten that you were speaking to a married woman.'

'I wish I could forget it,' he said, in a tone only sufficiently loud to be heard by Eveline, adding in a more elevated tone, 'You should be a happy man, Mowbray.'

'Why?'

'How dense you are!' exclaimed Eveline; 'don't you see, dear, he wants to pay me another compliment, and say that you have the best and handsomest wife, and I don't know what all? Fortunately I know him of old.'

Allison Mowbray seemed anxious to remove Eveline from the dangerous fascination of the captain's society, and he got

her away as soon as he could, which was not directly after dinner, she being unwilling to go.

Before they went, Captain Seyton succeeded in extracting from Eveline the name of the hotel at which they were stopping, and got an invitation to call.

He did call the very next day, and Eveline found Paris more tolerable now that she had some one to flirt with. Before marriage she had been a most determined and inveterate flirt, but now she was if anything worse, and poor Mowbray was on thorns of jealousy all day long.

Captain Seyton fell more in love with Eveline than ever, and he conceived the idea of persuading her to elope with him.

Regardless of consequences and defiant of the divorce court, he cherished his idea until he resolved to put it into execution without any further delay.

There was something however about Eveline's manner which made him timid of broaching the subject to her in person, so he adopted the coward's device of writing. He said :—

‘MY DEAREST EVELINE,

‘I have been examining my heart, and I find that I cannot live without you. Heaven alone knows how I have struggled with my passion and how I have suffered. I implore you to take pity upon me. If you refuse to listen to my prayers and give me your love in return for my passionate devotion, I will not answer for the consequences. I do not know what mad act I may be persuaded to commit—the grave of a suicide will be mine. For God's sake, Eveline, my own, my darling one, save me from this.

‘Far away from all who know us in a foreign land, in the sunny East, the land of love and of romance, what happiness will be ours !

‘Fly with me, love, this very night.

‘We shall meet at the ambassadors' ball. If you consent to elope with me, wear the emerald and diamond bracelet with the snake's head which I gave you in happier days gone by.

‘My carriage will be in waiting. If you should wear this pledge of a never-dying affection, I will give you my arm, conduct you to the carriage, and a wild delirious ecstatic joy will be ours. Oh, my love, my love, how slowly the hours will elapse until the time approaches for you to appear at Lady C——'s, and you sink into the arms of your adorer,

ALGERNON SEYTON.’

He bribed Eveline's French maid with a napoleon to take this letter to her mistress. The girl, thoroughly well versed in the art of intrigue, was only too happy to be made the medium of this dishonourable proposal; and at five o'clock in the afternoon Captain Seyton went for a stroll on the boulevards, after his interview with the French maid, fully persuaded that he had arranged everything in the most satisfactory manner, and could not fail of success.

CHAPTER XXII.

'THE DIAMOND BRACELET.'

It had been arranged between Mr. Mowbray and his wife that they should dine at six and go to the ambassadors' ball about ten.

Eveline had complained of a headache and lay down all the afternoon to rest herself, and prepare for the fatigue of the evening.

Mowbray had been out riding in the Bois, and dismounting his horse in the yard of the hotel, he entered the house and met the French maid in the act of going upstairs to answer her mistress's bell.

In one hand she had a tin can of hot water, and in the other Allison Mowbray fancied he saw a letter. This was quite enough to excite the suspicions of a jealous husband.

'Rosine,' he said, 'how is madam?'

'She is just woke, sir,' replied the French maid, in her broken English.

'What have you in your hand?'

'Ze 'ot water, sir.'

'But the other hand?'

'Noting, sir.'

'Nonsense, I can see a letter.'

'A lettare? Mon Dieu, no, sir!' replied Rosine, trying to hide the epistle in the folds of her dress.

With a dexterity which did her infinite credit, she succeeded in getting the letter into her pocket, in which was one addressed to herself by her own lover—in truth she had two or three, for Rosine was a sad coquette. The one for herself she substituted for the one addressed to her mistress, and given her by Captain Seyton.

Drawing this forth, on being pressed by Mr. Allison Mowbray, she said—

'It is private lettares, sir; one for me. See, Rosine Jouval, sir. It is for me.'

Mr. Mowbray glanced at the direction, made a sort of half apology, and expressed himself satisfied.

Rosine ran upstairs, muttering—

‘Oh, *mon Dieu*, vot narrow escapes I have had. Is he not jealous, this English husband? Poor madam, I have pity for her from the profound of my heart.’

Eveline was half awake.

‘See, madame, a lettare!’ exclaimed Rosine.

Eveline took it listlessly and broke the seal as if she intended to read it, but she was too tired, and, changing her mind, she put it under her pillow, turning over and going to sleep again, and not hearing one word which the maid addressed to her, though for fully five minutes she expatiated upon her devotion, her cleverness, and the terrible risk of detection she had run.

‘But the capitaine,’ she concluded, ‘*mais, mon Dieu*, what a man! How I could adore such a man. Madame is of women the most happy. That Fate may smile upon madame, I pray for this on my knees.’

Eveline said nothing, and Rosine, after laying out a dress, and some other articles of wearing apparel, went away for ten minutes, intending to call her mistress in time to dress for dinner.

All at once she woke up, being frightened by a disagreeable dream.

She had fancied that she was crossing the Simplon, and an avalanche was tearing down the mountain threatening to overwhelm her. With a shriek she threw away the bed clothes and scampered out of bed.

In the confusion the letter, which she had totally forgotten, had fallen upon the floor from beneath the pillow, and, without noticing it, she stood trembling and half awake.

A knock at the door was heard.

‘Who is there?’ she asked.

‘It is I! Allison, your husband,’ was the reply.

Eveline opened the door saying, as he entered—

‘Men should not come to a lady’s room at inconvenient times. What is it you want?’

‘Only to chat with you, dearest, while you dress.’

‘You know I hate any one in the room when I am dressing.’

‘And you know there is nothing I like so much as wit-

nessing your toilette. If I might be your maid I should be proud, charmed, and happy.'

'What rubbish you talk!' said Eveline, petulantly.

'My dear, you are in a bad temper. What has put you out?'

'I had a bad dream.'

'Oh, is that all? You will soon get over that.'

Mr. Mowbray's eye lighted upon the letter which was lying on the floor.

Eveline went to the washstand, and began to sponge her face with some cold water. She was so wretchedly sleepy, and thought the water would revive her, and wake her up.

Here was Allison Mowbray's opportunity.

Stooping down he picked the letter up and put it in his pocket.

The act did not pass unnoticed by Eveline, who exclaimed—

'What are you doing, dear?'

'Your handkerchief, my pet,' rejoined Mowbray, handing her one which he had picked up at the same time.

'Put it down and do go away. I shall never be dressed for dinner else.'

'My society seems very distasteful to you all at once.'

'It is, at improper times.'

Coming towards him she opened the door and positively pushed him out, locking herself in afterwards. Allison Mowbray went downstairs gladly with his prize, and gaining the shelter of his own apartments, opened the letter, which he read from beginning to end.

'Very well!' he said, between his clenched teeth, 'I am not a bit surprised. This is what I have expected all along.'

For some time he walked up and down the room, as was his custom when annoyed; occasionally he talked to himself, but by the time dinner was announced he was externally calm and had made up his mind how to act.

Eveline was dressed for dinner and for the ball. She had but to put her ornaments on and make one or two trifling alterations in her attire.

Mowbray was forced to admit that he had never seen any one look more lovely.

But the loveliness of his wife only made him more anxious for revenge for what he considered her heartless treachery and duplicity.

At dinner she was gay, and after drinking a glass or two of wine became very chatty and agreeable. She was more civil to her husband than she had been for some time.

'This is done to blind me,' said Allison Mowbray to himself.

'We shall enjoy ourselves, I am sure, at Lady C——'s to-night, dear!' she exclaimed; 'you see I have the *entree* of the very best society here.'

'Yes; you are generally liked.'

'By men—not women.'

'Oh! by men especially.'

'There is a tinge of sarcasm in your tone, dear; why are you sarcastic?' inquired Eveline.

'It is my fancy. I don't mean anything; do you?'

'Do I mean anything? what should I mean? How oddly you talk.'

'Do I talk so? Have you ever acted oddly, Eveline?'

'Very often,' she answered with a laugh.

'And will again, I daresay?'

'Oh! I won't answer for myself,' she replied.

After this the conversation flagged. He talked so curiously and seemed so jerky in his manner that Eveline ate the remainder of her dinner in silence.

After dinner Mowbray lighted a cigar and Eveline took up a book.

At nine she rose.

'Are you going to get ready?' he asked.

'It is time—is it not?' she answered.

'Yes; may I accompany you?'

'Where? Upstairs?'

'Yes. I have a fancy for putting on your ornaments to-night; may I?'

'Yes if you like, you silly, spooney, old fellow,' replied Eveline, laughing.

Mr. Mowbray lighted a candle, and they went upstairs together.

'Eveline had forgotten all about the letter, each line of which had eaten its way into Mowbray's heart, and was there visible as if written in letters of fire. He turned his gaze inwards, and kept on reading the hateful epistle, fully convinced that Eveline also had read it, and prepared to condemn her if she wore the hated bracelet which Algernon Seyton had given her.'

She handed him the key of her dressing case, and he, unlocking it, said,—

‘What will you have round your neck? Pearls dear?’

‘No. A married woman can’t wear pearls. I will have diamonds.’

‘He took out a magnificent set, and placed it on the dressing table, his hands trembled so much that he would not just then trust himself to put it on her.’

‘Rings?’ he queried.

‘Oh! That plain hoop with the emeralds and diamonds let in.’

He placed that with the necklet, and took up a handsome gold bracelet, with turquoise and coral.

‘Wear this dear,’ he exclaimed.

‘No. It is old and ugly.’

‘I wish it.’

‘And I don’t wish it,’ she said decisively. ‘Besides it will not go well with the other things; it is very odd you will not let me have my free will in little matters of this sort.’

‘Which will you have then?’

His voice trembled as much as his hands now, and if she had not been so much engaged in putting just the least suspicion of rouge on her cheeks, she would have noticed it.

‘Oh, the one with the diamonds and emeralds.’

‘This one?’ asked Allison Mowbray, holding up the obnoxious bracelet to make sure.

‘Yes.’

‘Who gave you this, Eveline?’ he continued.

‘Who? Let me see. It was a present from Algy Seyton; he bought it at Brussels one day.’

‘And you intend to wear it to-night?’

‘Most certainly I do.’

‘That is your decision.’

‘It is. What is there wonderful in that?’ she demanded in surprise, fixing her large expressive eyes upon him.

‘It is enough!’ cried Allison Mowbray, wildly, as he cast the bracelet from him as a thing of nought. ‘It is enough—my wife is false to me. Oh, my God! my God!’

‘Allison! what is the meaning of this? are you mad?’ exclaimed Eveline, astonished.

‘I believe I shall be presently.’

‘What have I done?’

'Can you ask?' he returned fiercely; 'you have done that which no virtuous woman should have done. I have got the proof of your guilt.'

'My guilt?'

'Yes, your guilt, madam. Read that letter.'

'Read it?'

'Yes. Read it again.'

Allison Mowbray handed her the letter which he had kept carefully concealed in his pocket, and she read it from beginning to end.

Then putting it down, she having become pale in spite of the rouge which had been newly laid on her cheeks, exclaimed earnestly—

'What if I tell you, Allison, that I never read that letter, and that the fact of my selecting the diamond bracelet is purely accidental?'

'I shall not believe you,' he answered.

'You will please yourself, but that is the exact fact. I never did read that letter. I am innocent. I swear to you, Allison, that I have not wronged you, in word or deed, and that had I read the letter I should have refused to go to the ball to night; more than that, I should have placed it in your hands, and told you to chastise the man's insolence as he deserves.'

'These heroics are only what I anticipated, Eveline,' rejoined Mr. Mowbray; 'you may assert and deny until doomsday and I shall not believe you. All is at end between us, and the principal part of my misery is caused by the love which I have borne for you and bear you still.'

'Allison, you must believe me!' cried Eveline, sinking on her knees before him. 'See, I am kneeling to you. I never knelt to a man before; I am innocent. Indeed, indeed! I am, Allison. I remember now, my maid brought me the letter, and I opened it intending to read it, but fell asleep and forgot all about it. You must have picked it up as it lay on the floor. Oh! why did you not tell me at once?'

'Because I wished for proof. Rise, Eveline; I have no pity for you. Go to this ball; your paramour is waiting for you.'

'This is too much!' said Eveline, rising and regarding him with flushed cheeks and a heaving bosom.

'You have never loved me. I am convinced of it now.'

Go and live in your shame with Captain Seyton ; I will have no more of you. This is what I might have expected from a girl like you,' said Allison Mowbray, bitterly.

'Oh! if it comes to this!' exclaimed Eveline, angrily, 'I, too, can be indignant, and I will fight you with your own weapons. Who are you, sir, and how did you become possessed of the property you own?'

'It is mine by right of inheritance, but I will not allow you to change the subject. You are a vile and worthless woman and I will tolerate you no longer.'

'You dare to address me in this way! Beware, Allison Mowbray. If you make me an enemy you will repent it.'

'You!' replied Allison Mowbray; 'you are too contemptible. Go to the East with the man who has supplanted me in your affections. We part for ever.'

With a malignant glance he quitted the room and Eveline sank into a chair, breathing heavily.

The shock she had just received nearly prostrated her, but recovering herself in a few minutes she descended the stairs to the drawing room, where she expected to find Mowbray, determining that the affair should not end there.

CHAPTER XXIII.

‘THE WHIRLWIND.’

As she neared the drawing-room she heard the sound of voices and stood still to listen.

One voice was that of her husband, the other seemed strangely familiar to her. Was it not that of Charles Danvers Dagley?

A moment's listening showed her it was. She heard him say—

‘Why am I here? Who's to prevent me from coming here, I should like to know? not you, certainly. You are swelling about in Paris—why should not I swell about too?’

There was no doubt, from the thick husky manner in which Mr. Dagley spoke, that he was intoxicated.

Eveline entered the room; there were tears in her eyes, and it was easy to see that she had lately been much agitated.

‘Ah, my dear,’ exclaimed Dagley, with coarse familiarity;—‘glad to see you. What's the matter?’

‘My husband has been insulting me. I am delighted to think, Mr. Dagley, that at last I have an opportunity of questioning you respecting him. Who is this man?’

As she spoke she pointed to Mowbray.

‘I don't see that there is much harm in your knowing, now that you are man and wife, and I'll tell you if you like,’ replied Dagley.

‘Speak if you dare!’ exclaimed Allison Mowbray, seizing him by the arm.

‘Don't touch me,’ answered Dagley; ‘I've been drinking, and I'm dangerous if I'm interfered with.’

‘Believe me, Mr. Dagley, you will confer the greatest possible favour upon me if you will tell me who this man is,’ continued Eveline.

‘You'll be my friend if I do tell you?’ he asked, with drunken gravity.

‘I will.’

‘Fool!’ hissed Allison Mowbray between his teeth.

‘Oh, no, I’m not. I’m not such a fool as I look. I’m going to tell your wife what I know of you; there should be no secrets between a man and his wife, should there, ma’am?’

‘Certainly not,’ answered Eveline.

‘That’s just what I say. Now, his name is no more Mowbray than mine. His name’s Smith, and he’s well known in the States as a horse-dealer and card-sharper; he’d sharp anybody, he would.’

Allison Mowbray attempted to strike his former companion and friend, but Eveline, snatching up a knife, stepped between them, and said—‘Go one step nearer, and——’

A glance from her flashing eyes sufficiently warned him of the danger he would incur, and he halted half-way.

‘That’s plucky, that’s what I like to see,’ cried Dagley. ‘Well, I’ll go on; you keep between us, ma’am, he’s apt to be nasty at times. Well, he knew Mr. Allison Mowbray, and got all his secrets out of him. He knew that he was coming into an estate in England, and he was well aware that Mr. Mowbray had been so long absent that no one would recognise him, so he got him into a drunken row in Buffalo, and the poor fellow got shot through the heart—who shot him God alone knows! Smith came over to England, and representing himself to be the heir, as soon as he heard of the old Mr. Mowbray’s death, claimed the estate. He had the dead man’s ring and papers, and deceived the solicitors; but he’s no more right to the property than I have, and he pays me a thousand a-year to keep me quiet. I don’t mind telling you though, it’s all in the family.’

‘Chattering idiot!’ cried Allison Mowbray, gnashing his teeth with rage.

Dagley was so intoxicated that he stumbled over a stool and fell headlong on the floor, when he went on talking to himself in an incoherent manner, and laughing occasionally in an immoderate manner, as if he had done something very clever.

‘Soh!’ exclaimed Eveline, ‘you are an impostor, Mr. Mowbray.’

‘Never mind what I am. There is no doubt about what you are,’ he answered, rudely.

‘I shall leave you this night,’ Eveline went on, ‘and my first act on reaching London will be to expose you.’

‘Of course you will go away from here; we know all about the superior attraction, but if you expose me, you lose the money I settled upon you.’

‘You admit the truth of your drunken confederate’s allegations?’

‘I admit nothing.’

‘You shall not long enjoy your ill-gotten wealth, that I promise you. To-night you have treated me cruelly, and insulted me grossly. I will never, never forgive you! Oh, what folly I have been guilty of!’

Allison Mowbray stood with his arms folded, his head bowed beneath the whirlwind which had just passed over him. He did not attempt to explain or deny anything. He was perfectly passive.

Eveline wasted no more words over him, she went to her room and locked herself in.

The next day, she, still refusing to leave the room, so as to give her husband no ground for making any accusation against her, sent a telegram to England requesting her father’s presence.

He came at once.

To him she revealed everything.

Mr. St. Pierre took her back with him to England, and promptly sought an interview with the solicitors who represented the Mowbray family. They heard his statement with a silent wonder, but as Mr. Dagley was not forthcoming, and there was no evidence to support the charge against their client, and no claimant for the estates came forward, they expressed themselves unable to do anything in the matter.

Mr. Dagley was never seen in England again. What became of him was a mystery, but Allison Mowbray managed to keep him out of the way, so that it was impossible to prove the truth or the falsity of his tale.

Mr. St. Pierre had met with some heavy losses lately, and he said to his daughter—

‘The man has made a handsome settlement upon you, and he must pay it whether you are living with him or not, so long as you give him no ground to apply to the Divorce Court; let matters rest as they are.’

‘I will never touch a halfpenny of his!’ cried Eveline.

‘What will you do, then? I cannot afford any longer to supply you with money, and you cannot marry again, because you are not a widow?’

'I will go into a nunnery, then,' she answered.

'That you can do, if you like,' replied her father, calmly.

Bursting into tears, Eveline sobbed as if her heart would break, and Mr. St. Pierre left her alone.

She saw when it was too late that her life had been a mistake, and that there was a wretched future before her.

What to do she knew not.

She never saw Allison Mowbray again, and he did not pay her the allowance he had settled upon her. Silver Pines was sold, and he went abroad with the money, bidding a long adieu to London and Parisian society.

Eveline could not bear to be seen anywhere, and she eventually went into the wildest part of Cumberland, and entering a convent, became a professed Sister of Mercy, and spent her time in teaching the poor, visiting the sick, and trying to like the new religion which she had embraced.

She had been completely wrecked.

There was no hope or help for her; she might have succeeded in the world of fashion if she had been a widow, but she was married, though she never saw her husband, and it was that fact which rendered her life miserable. Let us hope she found consolation in her religious duties.

Ada Mapleson meanwhile had become reconciled to Ernest Lacy, and having seen and confessed the error of her ways was in time the happy mother of children, loved and respected by all who knew her, and not compelled, like her unhappy cousin, to wish each hour the last, on account of the bitterness it brought with it.

Such was the fate of our Girl of the Period—as she sowed, so did she reap.

[THE END.]

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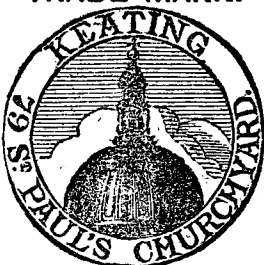
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